

THE
HILLYARS AND THE BURTONS
COLLECTION
OF
BRITISH AUTHORS.

VOL. 776.

THE HILLYARS AND THE BURTONS

BY

HENRY KINGSLEY.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

COLLECTION
OF
BRITISH AUTHORS
TAUCHNITZ EDITION.

By the same Author,

RAVENSHOE	2 vols.
AUSTIN ELLIOT	1 vol.
THE RECOLLECTIONS OF GEOFFRY HAMLYN	2 vols.

THE
HILLYARS AND THE BURTONS:

A STORY OF TWO FAMILIES.

BY

HENRY KINGSLEY,

AUTHOR OF "AUSTIN ELLIOT," "RAVENSHOE," ETC.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1865.

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THE
HILLIARS AND THE BERTONS:

A STORY OF TWO FAMILIES

HENRY KINGSELL

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IN TWO VOLUMES

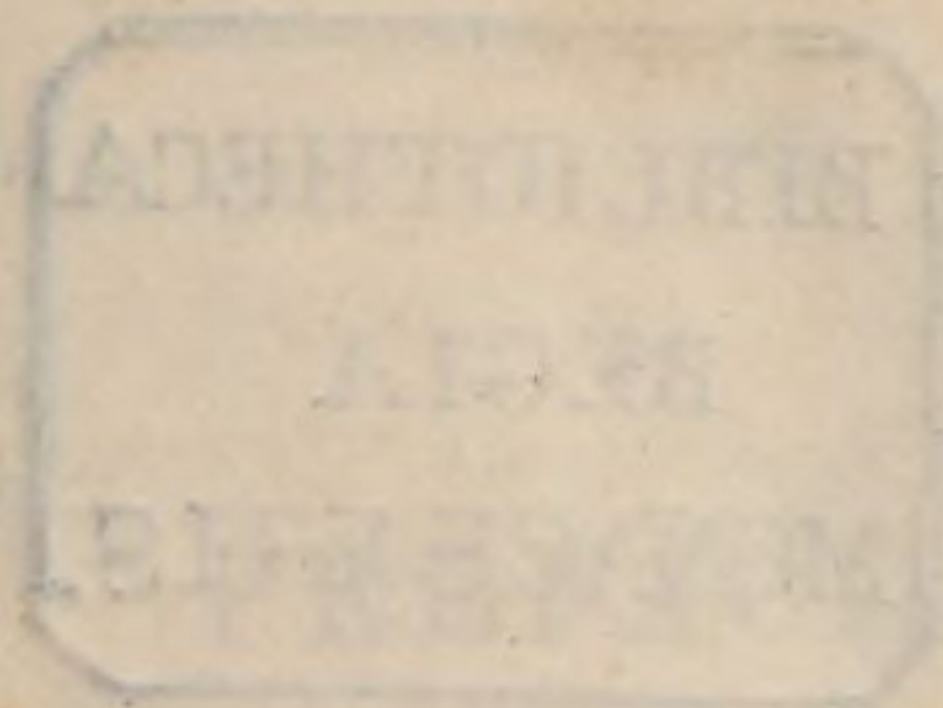
VOL. I.

LONDON

BERNARD TAYLOR

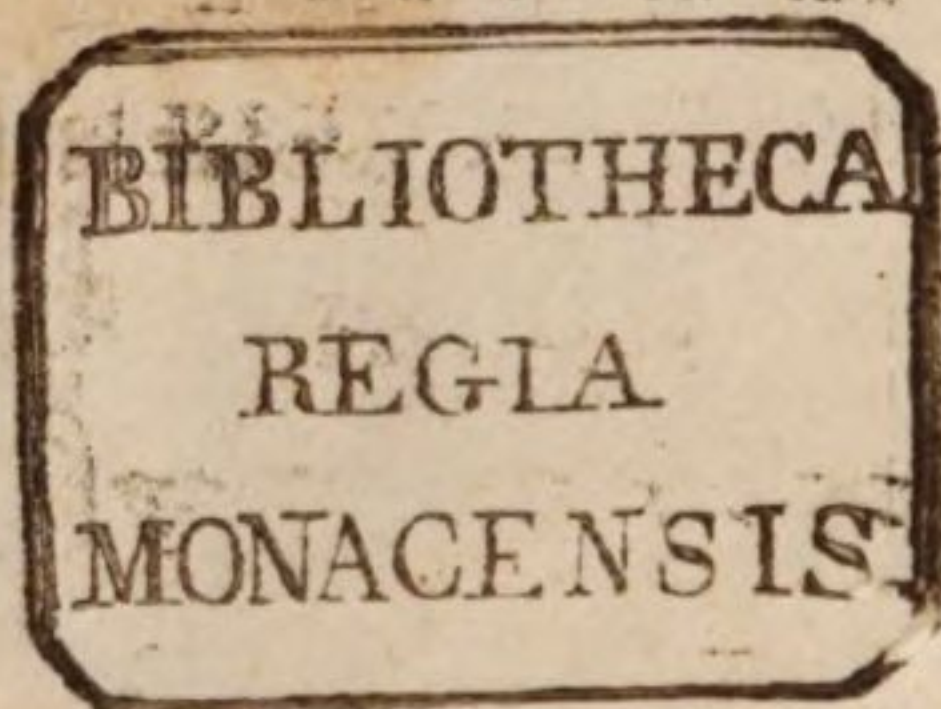
1865

The House of Commons is thanked.



THIS TALE IS DEDICATED TO

MY WIFE.



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PREFACE.

IN this story, an uneducated girl, who might, I fancy, after a year and a half at a boarding-school, have developed into a very noble lady, is arraigned before the reader, and awaits his judgment.

The charge against her is, that by an overstrained idea of duty, she devoted herself to her brother, and made her lover but a secondary person. I am instructed to reply on her behalf, that in the struggle between inclination and what she considered her duty, she, right or wrong, held by duty at the risk of breaking her own heart.

I suppose that most people have their opinion on the old question between love and duty. We can make no rule about it: we solve it continually, by weighing the circumstances which have forced it upon us, on instinct. With regard to the case of Emma Burton I shal lnot state my own conclusions. I have used all

my best art in putting the question before the reader, and must leave him to draw his own. I am only sorry to see such a very important social question, a question which, (thanks to the nobleness of our women,) comes *en visage* to us continually, so very poorly handled.

Mrs. Quickly must keep the name I gave her, perhaps in too great a hurry. But the reader will perceive that she is not the Quickly of Shakespear; not the blundering, silly, goodnatured, prurient old questionable female, of Shakespear; but, perhaps, nearer like a certain old lady, who looks out of a certain window on the right, in a certain march to Finchley; an old lady who continues to reproduce herself, and will continue — until —

CONTENTS

OF VOLUME I.

	Page
CHAPTER I. Mr. Secretary Oxton thinks Gerty Neville little better than a Fool	1
— II. James Burton's Story: shows the disgraceful Lowness of his Origin	8
— III. James Burton's Story: Cousin Reuben	17
— IV. The Colonial Secretary sees Snakes and other Vermin	21
— V. James Burton's Story: the Ghost's Room is invaded, and James puts his Foot through the Floor	28
— VI. James Burton's Story: the Preliminaries to the Momentous Expedition to Stanlake	38
— VII. The Battle of Barker's Gap	50
— VIII. James Burton's Story: the immediate Results of the Expedition to Stanlake	60
— IX. Sir George Hillyar	71
— X. Erne makes his Escape from the Brazen Tower	77
— XI. The Secretary sees nothing for it but to Submit	85
— XII. Disposes of Samuel Burton for a Time	91
— XIII. James Burton's Story: the Golden Thread begins to run off the Reel	97
— XIV. The Gleam of the Autumn Sunset	109
— XV. In which the Snake creeps out of the Grass	115
— XVI. James Burton's Story: Erne and Emma	122
— XVII. Erne and Reuben	130
— XVIII. James Burton's Story: Reuben and Sir George Hillyar	135

	Page
CHAPTER XIX. Samuel Burton goes into the Licensed Victual- ling Line	145
— XX. James Burton's Story: Reuben entertains Mys- terious and Unsatisfactory Company	153
— XXI. Gerty goes on the War-trail	162
— XXII. James Burton's Story: very low Company	174
— XXIII. James Burton's Story: the Hillyars and the Burtons among the Tombs	181
— XXIV. Homeward Bound	194
— XXV. Gerty's First Innings	200
— XXVI. James Burton's Story: James and his Sister fall out	214
— XXVII. James Burton's Story: the Ghost shows a Light for the First Time	219
— XXVIII. Affairs at Stanlake	235
— XXIX. James Burton's Story: the Beginning of the Bad Times	243
— XXX. James Burton's Story: in which two great Pieces of good Fortune befall us — one Visible, the other Invisible	254
— XXXI. George begins to take a New Interest in Reuben	261
— XXXII. Gerty's First Hibernation terminates	274
— XXXIII. James Burton's Story: the Ghost shows a Light for the Second Time	277
— XXXIV. Sir George's Escritoire	289
— XXXV. James Burton's Story: Miss Brown's Troubles come to an End, while Mr. Erne Hillyar's fairly Commence	298
— XXXVI. Le Roi est mort — vive le Roi	305
— XXXVII. James Burton's Story: Erne's Nurse	309
— XXXVIII. Sir George Hillyar is Witness for Character	314
— XXXIX. Uncle Bob surprises Erne	322
— XL. The Last of the Churchyard	329

THE
HILLYARS AND THE BURTONS:

A STORY OF TWO FAMILIES.

CHAPTER I.

Mr. Secretary Oxton thinks Gerty Neville little better than a Fool.

THE Houses were "up," and the Colonial Secretary was in the bosom of his family.

It had been one of the quietest and pleasantest little sessions on record. All the Government bills had slid easily through. There had been a little hitch on the new Scab Bill; several members with infected runs opposing it lustily; threatening to murder it by inches in committee, and so on: but, on the Secretary saying that he should not feel it his duty to advise his Excellency to prorogue until it was passed, other members put it to the opposing members whether they were to sit there till Christmas, with the thermometer at 120°, and the opposing members gave way with a groan; so a very few days afterwards his Excellency put on his best uniform, cocked hat, sword and all, and came down and prorogued them. And then, taking their boys from school, and mounting their horses, they all rode away, east, north, and west, through forest and swamp, over

plain and mountain, to their sunny homes, by the pleasant river-sides of the interior.

So the Colonial Secretary was in the bosom of his family. He was sitting in his verandah in a rocking-chair, dressed in white from head to foot, with the exception of his boots, which were shining black, and his necktie, which was bright blue. He was a tall man, and of noble presence — a man of two-and-forty, or thereabouts — with a fine fearless eye, as of one who had confronted the dangers of an infant colony, looking altogether like the highly intellectual, educated man he was; and on every button of his clean white coat, on every fold of his spotless linen, in every dimple of his close-shaved, red-brown face, was written in large letters the word, Gentleman.

He had come down to one of his many stations, the favourite one, lying about 300 miles along the coast from Palmerston, the capital of Cooksland; and, having arrived only the night before, was dreaming away the morning in his verandah, leaving the piles of papers, domestic and parliamentary, which he had accumulated on a small table beside him, totally neglected.

For it was impossible to work. The contrast between the burning streets of Palmerston and this cool verandah was so exquisite, that it became an absolute necessity to think about that and nothing else. Just outside, in the sun, a garden, a wilderness of blazing flowers, sloped rapidly down to the forest, whose topmost boughs were level with your feet. Through the forest rushed the river, and beyond the forest was the broad, yellow plain, and beyond the plain the heath, and beyond the heath the gleaming sea with two fantastic purple islands on the horizon.

The Colonial Secretary had no boys to bring home from school, for only six months before this he had married the beauty of the colony, Miss Neville, who was at that moment in the garden with her younger sister gathering flowers.

The Secretary by degrees allowed his eyes to wander from the beautiful prospect before him, to the two white figures among the flowers. By degrees his attention became concentrated on them, and after a time a shade of dissatisfaction stole over his handsome face, and a wrinkle or two formed on his broad forehead.

Why was this? The reason was a very simple one: he saw that Mrs. Oxton was only half intent upon her flowers, and was keeping one eye upon her lord and master. He said, "Botheration."

She saw that he spoke, though she little thought what he said; and so she came floating easily towards him through the flowers, looking by no means unlike a great white and crimson Amaryllis herself. She may have been a thought too fragile, a thought too hectic — all real Australian beauties are so; she looked, indeed, as though, if you blew at her, her hair would come off like the down of a dandelion, but nevertheless she was so wonderfully beautiful, that you could barely restrain an exclamation of delighted surprise when you first saw her. This being came softly up to the Secretary, put her arm round his neck, and kissed him; and yet the Secretary gave no outward signs of satisfaction whatever. Still the Secretary was not a "brute;" far from it.

"My love," said Mrs. Oxton.

"Well, my dear," said the Secretary.

"I want to ask you a favour, my love."

"My sweetest Agnes, it is quite impossible. I will send Edward as sub-overseer to Tullabaloora; but into a Government place he *does not go*."

"My dear James —"

"It is no use, Agnes; it is really no use. I have been accused in the public papers of placing too many of my own and my wife's family. I have been taunted with it in the House. There is great foundation of truth in it. It is really no use, if you talk till doomsday. What are you going to give me for lunch?"

Mrs. Oxton was perfectly unmoved; she merely seated herself comfortably on her husband's knee.

"Suppose, now," she said, "that you had been putting yourself in a wicked passion for nothing. Suppose I had changed my mind about Edward. Suppose I thought you quite right in not placing any more of our own people. And suppose I only wanted a little information about somebody's antecedents. What then?"

"Why then I have been a brute. Say on."

"My dearest James, do you know anything against Lieutenant Hillyar?"

"H'm," said the Secretary. "Nothing new. He came over here under a cloud; but so many young men do that. I am chary of asking too many questions. He was very fast at home, I believe, and went rambling through Europe for ten years; yet I do not think I should be justified in saying I knew anything very bad against him."

"He will be Sir George Hillyar," said Mrs. Oxton, pensively.

"He will indeed," said the Secretary, "and have ten thousand a year. He will be a catch for some one."

"My dear, I am afraid he is caught."

"No! Who is it?"

"No other than our poor Gerty. She has been staying at the Barkers', in the same house with him; and the long and the short of it is, that they are engaged."

The Secretary rose and walked up and down the verandah. He was very much disturbed.

"My dear," he said at last, "I would give a thousand pounds if this were not true."

"Why? do you know anything against him?"

"Well, just now I carelessly said I did not; but now when the gentleman coolly proposes himself for my brother-in-law! It is perfectly intolerable!"

"Do you know anything special, James?"

"No. But look at the man, my love. Look at his insolent, contradictory manner. Look at that nasty drop he has in his eyes. Look at his character for profligacy. Look at his unpopularity in the force; and then think of our beautiful little Gerty being handed over to such a man. Oh! Lord, you know it really is —"

"I hate the man as much as you do," said Mrs. Oxton. "I can't bear to be in the room with him. But Gerty loves him."

"Poor little bird."

"And he is handsome."

"Confound him, yes. And charming too, of course, with his long pale face and his *dolce far niente*, insolent manner, and his great eyes like blank windows, out of which the devil looks once a day, for fear you might forget he was there. Oh! a charming man!"

"Then he will be a baronet, with an immense fortune; and Gerty will be Lady Hillyar."

"And the most unfortunate little flower in the wide world," said the Secretary.

"I think you are right," said Mrs. Oxton, with a sigh. "See, here she comes; don't let her know I have told you."

Gertrude Neville came towards them at this moment. She was very like her sister, but still more fragile in form; a kind of caricature of her sister. The white in her face was whiter, and the red redder; her hair was of a shade more brilliant brown; and she looked altogether like some wonderful hectic ghost. If you were delighted with her sister's beauty you were awed with hers; not awed because there was anything commanding or determined in the expression of her face, but because she was so very fragile and gentle. The first glance of her great hazel eyes put her under your protection to the death. You had a feeling of awe, while you wondered why it had pleased God to create anything so helpless, so beautiful, and so good, and to leave her to the chances and troubles of this rough world. You could no more have willingly caused a shade of anxiety to pass over that face than you could have taken the beautiful little shell parrakeet, which sat on her shoulder, and killed it before her eyes.

The Secretary set his jaw, and swore to himself, that *it* should never be; but what was the good of his swearing?

"See, James," she said to him, speaking with a voice like that of a stock-dove among the deep black shadows of an English wood in June, "I am going

to fill all your vases with flowers. Idle Agnes has run away to you, and has left me all the work. See here; I am going to set these great fern boughs round the china vase on the centre table, and bend them so that they droop, you see. And then I shall lay in these long wreaths of scarlet Kennedia to hang over the fern, and then I shall tangle in these scarlet passion-flowers, and then I shall have a circle of these belladonna lilies, and in the centre of all I shall put this moss-rosebud —

For the bride she chose, the red, red, rose,
And by its thorn died she.

“James, don’t break my heart, for I love him. My own brother, I have never had a brother but you: try to make the best of him for my sake. You will now, won’t you? I know you don’t like him; your characters are dissimilar; but I am sure you will get to. I did not like him at first; but it came upon me in time. You don’t know how really good he is, and how bitterly he has been ill-used. Come, James, say you will try to like him.”

What could the poor Secretary do but soothe her, and defer any decided opinion on the matter. If it had been Mr. Cornelius Murphy making a modest request, the Secretary would have been stern enough, would have done what he should have done here — put his veto on it once and for ever; but he could not stand his favourite little sister-in-law, with her tears, her beauty, and her caresses. He temporised.

But his holiday, to which he had looked forward so long, was quite spoilt. Little Gerty Neville had wound herself so thoroughly round his heart; she had

been such a sweet little confidant to him in his courtship; had brought so many precious letters, had planned so many meetings; had been, in short, such a dear little go-between, that when he thought of her being taken away from him by a man of somewhat queer character, whom he heartily despised and disliked, it made him utterly miserable. As Gerty had been connected closely with the brightest part of a somewhat stormy life, so also neither he nor his wife had ever laid down a plan for the brighter future which did not include her; and now! — it was intolerable.

He brooded for three days, and then, having seen to the more necessary part of his station work, he determined to go and make fuller inquiries. So the big bay horse was saddled, and he rode thoughtfully away; across the paddocks, through the forest, over the plain, down to the long yellow sands fringed with snarling surf, and so northward towards the faint blue promontory of Cape Wilberforce.

CHAPTER II.

James Burton's Story: shows the disgraceful Lowness of his Origin.

I AM of the same trade as my father — a blacksmith — although I have not had hammer or pincers in my hand this ten years. And, although I am not in the most remote degree connected with any aristocratic family, yet I hold the title of Honourable. The Honourable James Burton being a member of the supreme council of the Colony of Cooksland.

As early as I can remember, my father carried on

his trade in Brown's Row, Chelsea. His business was a very good one — what we call a good shoeing trade, principally with the omnibus horses. It paid very well, for my father had four men in his shop; though, if he had had his choice, he would have preferred some higher branch of smith's work, for he had considerable mechanical genius, and no small ambition, of a sort.

I think that my father was the ideal of all the blacksmiths who ever lived. He was *the* blacksmith. A man with a calm, square, honest face; very strong, very good-humoured, with plenty of kindly interest in his neighbours' affairs, and a most accurate memory for them. He was not only a most excellent tradesman, but he possessed those social qualities, which are so necessary in a blacksmith, to a very high degree; for in our rank in life the blacksmith is a very important person indeed. He is owner of the very best gossip-station, after the bar of the public-house: and, consequently, if he be a good fellow (as he is pretty certain to be, though this may be partiality on my part,) he is a man more often referred to, and consulted with, than the publican; for this reason — that the *married women* are jealous of the publican, and not so of the blacksmith. As for my father, he was umpire of the buildings — the stopper of fights, and, sometimes, even the healer of matrimonial differences.

More than once I have known a couple come and "have it out" in my father's shop. Sometimes, during my apprenticeship, my father would send me out of the way on these occasions; would say to me, for instance, "Hallo, old man, here's Bob Chittle and his missis a-coming; cut away and help mother a bit."

But at other times he would not consider it necessary for me to go, and so I used to stay, and hear it all. The woman invariably began; the man confined himself mostly to sulky contradictions. My father, and I, and the men, went on with our work; my father would throw in a soothing word wherever he could, until the woman began to cry; upon which my father, in a low confidential growl, addressing the man as "old chap," would persuade him to go and make it up with her. And he and she, having come there for no other purpose, would do so.

My mother never assisted at this sort of scenes, whether serious or trifling. She utterly ignored the shop at such times, and was preternaturally busy in the house among her pots, and pans, and children, ostentatiously singing. When it was all over she used accidentally to catch sight of the couple, and be for one moment stricken dumb with amazement, and then burst into voluble welcome. She was supposed to know nothing at all about what had passed. Sweet mother! thy arts were simple enough.

She was a very tall woman, with square, large features, who had never, I think, been handsome. When I begin my story my mother was already the mother of nine children, and I, the eldest, was fifteen; so, if she had at any time had any beauty, it must have vanished long before; but she was handsome enough for us. When she was dressed for church, in all the colours of the rainbow, in a style which would have driven Jane Clarke out of her mind, she was always inspected by the whole family before she started, and pronounced satisfactory. And at dinner my sister

Emma would perhaps say, "Law! mother did look so beautiful in church this morning; you never!"

She had a hard time of it with us. The family specialities were health, good humour, and vivacity; somewhat too much of the last among the junior members, I, Joe, and Emma, might be trusted, but all the rest were terrible pickles; the most unlucky children I ever saw. Whenever I was at work with father, and we saw a crowd coming round the corner, he would say, "Cut away, old chap, and see who it is;" for we knew it must either be one of our own little ones, or a young Chittle. If it was one of the young Chittles, I used to hold up my hand and whistle, and father used to go on with his work. But if I was silent, and in that way let father know that it was one of our own little ones, he would begin to roar out, and want to know which it was, and what he'd been up to. To which I would have to roar in return (I give you an instance only, out of many such) that it was Fred. That he had fallen off a barge under Battersea Bridge. Had been picked out by young Tom Cole. Said he liked it. Or that it was Eliza. Had wedged her head into a gas pipe. Been took out black in the face. Said Billy Chittle had told her she wasn't game to it. These were the sort of things I had to roar out to my father, while I had the delinquent in my arms, and was carrying him or her indoors to mother; the delinquent being in a triumphant frame of mind, evidently under the impression that he had distinguished himself, and added another flower to the chaplet of the family honour.

I never saw my mother out of temper. On these, and other occasions, she would say that, Lord 'a mercy!

no woman ever was teased and plagued with her children as she was (and there was a degree of truth in that). That she didn't know what would become of them (which was to a certain extent true also); that she hoped none of them would come to a bad end (in which hope I sincerely joined); and that finally, she thought that if some of them were well shook, and put to bed, it would do 'em a deal of good, and that their Emma would never love them any more. But they never cared for this sort of thing. They were not a bit afraid of mother. They were never shook; their Emma continued to love them; and, as for being put to bed they never thought of such a thing happening to them, until they heard the rattle of brother Joe's crutch on the floor, when he came home from the night school.

Brother Joe's crutch. Yes; our Joe was a cripple. With poor Joe, that restless vivacity to which I have called your attention above, had ended very sadly. He was one of the finest children ever seen; but, when only three years old, poor Joe stole away, and climbed up a ladder — he slipped, when some seven or eight feet from the ground, and fell on his back, doubling one of his legs under him. The little soul fluttered between earth and heaven for some time, but at last determined to stay with us. All that science, skill, and devotion could do, was done for him at St. George's Hospital; but poor Joe was a hunchback, with one leg longer than the other, but with the limbs of a giant, and the face of a Byron.

It is a great cause of thankfulness to me, when I think that Joe inherited the gentle, patient temper of his father and mother. Even when a mere boy, I be-

gan dimly to understand that it was fortunate that Joe was good-tempered. When I and the other boys would be at rounders, and he would be looking intently and eagerly on, with his fingers twitching with nervous anxiety to get hold of the stick, shouting now to one, and now to another, by name, and now making short runs, in his excitement, on his crutch; at such times, I say, it used to come into my boy's head, that it was as well that Joe was a good-tempered fellow; and this conviction grew on me year by year, as I watched with pride and awe the great intellect unfolding, and the mighty restless ambition soaring higher and higher. Yes, it was well that Joe had learned to love in his childhood.

Joe's unfailing good humour, combined with his affliction, had a wonderful influence on us for good. His misfortune being so fearfully greater than any of our petty vexations, and his good temper being so much more unfailing than ours, he was there continually among us as an example — an example which it was impossible not to follow to some extent; even if one had not had an angel to point to it for us.

For, in the sense of being a messenger of good, certainly my sister Emma was an angel. She was a year younger than me. She was very *handsome*, not very pretty, made on a large model like my mother, but with fewer angles. Perhaps the most noticeable thing about her was her voice. Whether the tone of it was natural, or whether it had acquired that tone from being used almost exclusively in cooing to, and soothing, children, I cannot say; but there was no shrillness in it: it was perfectly, nay singularly clear;

but there was not a sharp note in the whole of sweet Emma's gamut.

She was very much devoted to all of us; but towards Joe her devotion was intensified. I do not assert — because I do not believe — that she loved him better than the rest of us, but from an early age she simply *devoted* herself to him. I did not see it at first. The first hint of it which I got was in the first year of my apprenticeship. I had come in to tea, and father had relieved me in the shop, and all our little ones had done tea and were talking nonsense, at which I began to assist. We were talking about who each of us was to marry, and what we would have for dinner on the auspicious occasion. It was arranged that I was to marry Miss de Bracy, from the Victoria Theatre, and we were to have sprats and gin-and-water; and that such a one was to marry such a one; but on one thing the little ones were agreed, that Emma was to marry Joe. When they cried out this, she raised her eyes to mine for an instant, and dropped them again with a smile. I wondered why then, but I know now.

On my fifteenth birthday I was bound to my father. I think that was nearly the happiest day of my life. The whole family was in a state of rampant pride about it. I am sure I don't know what there was to be proud of, but proud we were. Joe sat staring at me with his bright eyes, every now and then giving a sniff of profound satisfaction, or pegging out in a restless manner for a short expedition into the court. Emma remarked several times, "Lawk, only just to think about Jim!" And my younger brothers and sisters kept on saying to all their acquaintances in

the street, "Our Jim is bound to father," with such a very triumphant air, that the other children resented it, and Sally Agar said something so disparaging of the blacksmith-trade in general, that our Eliza gave her a good shove; upon which Jane Agar, the elder sister, shook our Eliza, and, when Emma came out to the rescue, put her tongue out at her; which had such an effect on Emma's gentle spirit that she gave up the contest at once, and went indoors in tears, and for the rest of the day told every friend she met, "Lawk, there, if that Jane Agar didn't take and put her tongue out at me, because their Sally shoved our Eliza, and I took and told her she hadn't ought to it:" and they retailed it to other girls again; and at last it was known all over the buildings that Jane had gone and put her tongue out at Emma Burton; and it was unanimously voted that she ought to be ashamed of herself.

We were simple folk, easily made happy, even by seeing that the other girls were fond of our sister. But there was another source of happiness to us on that auspicious fifteenth birthday of mine. That day week we were to move into the great house.

Our present home was a very poor place, only a six-roomed house; and that, with nine children and another apprentice besides myself, was intolerable. Any time this year past we had seen that it was necessary to move; but there had been one hitch to our doing so — there was no house to move into, except into a very large house which stood by itself, as it were fronting the buildings opposite our forge; which contained twenty-five rooms, some of them very large, and

which was called by us indifferently, Church Place, or Queen Elizabeth's Palace.

It had been in reality the palace of the young Earl of Essex; a very large three-storied house old brick, with stone-mullioned windows and doorways. Many of the windows were blind, bricked up at different times as the house descended in the social scale. The roof was singularly high, hanging somewhat far over a rich cornice, and in that roof there was a single large dormer window at the north end.

The house had now been empty for some time, and it had always had a great attraction for us children. In the first place it was empty; in the second place, it had been inhabited by real princesses; and in the third, there was a ghost, who used to show a light in the afore-mentioned dormer window the first Friday in every month.

On the summer's evenings we had been used to see it towering aloft between us and the setting sun, which filled the great room on the first floor with light, some rays of which came through into our narrow street. Mother had actually once been up in that room, and had looked out of the window westward, and seen the trees of Chelsea farm (now Cremorne Gardens). What a room that would be to play in! Joe pegged down the back yard and back again with excitement, when he thought of it. We were going to live there, and father was going to let all the upper part in lodgings, and Cousin Reuben —

CHAPTER III.

James Burton's Story: Cousin Reuben.

AND Cousin Reuben had applied for lodgings from the very moment he heard of our move, and was actually coming to live with us. Was this as satisfactory as all the rest of it? Why, no. And this is why I made that pause at the end of the last chapter. We had noticed that a shade had passed over our father's face; and, we being simple and affectionate people, that shade had been reflected on ours, though we hardly knew why.

For our Cousin Reuben was a great favourite with all of us. He had been apprenticed to a waterman, but had won his coat and freedom a few months before this. He was a merry, slangy, dapper fellow, about seventeen, always to be found at street corners with his hands in his pockets, talking loud. We had been very proud of his victory; it was the talk of all the water-side; he rowed in such perfect form, and with such wonderful rapidity. The sporting papers took him up. He was matched at some public-house to row against somebody else for some money. He won it, but there was a dispute about it, and the sporting papers had leading articles thereon. But the more famous Reuben became, the more my father's face clouded when he spoke of him.

That birthday night I was sleepily going up to bed, when my father stopped me by saying, "Old man, you and me must have a talk," whereupon my mother de-

parted. "Jim," said he as soon as she was gone, "did you ever hear anything about your cousin Reuben's father?"

I said quickly, "No; but I had often thought it curious that we had never heard anything of him."

"The time is come, my boy, when you must know as much as I do. It is a bitter thing to have to tell you; but you are old enough to share the family troubles." And I heard the following story: —

Samuel Burton had been a distant cousin of my father's. When about twelve years old, he had expressed a wish to go into service, and his friends had got for him a place as page or steward-room boy, in the family of an opulent gentleman.

At the time of his going there the heir of the house was a mere infant. As time went on, his father, anxious for him to escape the contaminations of a public school, sent him to a highly expensive private tutor; and the boy selected Samuel Burton, his favourite, to accompany him as his valet.

The father had been anxious that his boy should escape the contamination of a public school — the more so, because, at the age of thirteen, he was a very difficult and somewhat vicious boy. The father took the greatest care, and made every possible inquiry. The Rev. Mr. Easy was a man of high classical attainments, and unblemished character. There were only two other pupils both of the most respectable rank in life — one, the son and heir of Sir James Mottesfont; the other, son of the great city man, Mr. Peters. Nothing could be more satisfactory. Alas! the poor father in avoiding Charybdis had run against Scylla. In avoiding the diluted vice of a public school, he had sent his son

into a perfectly undiluted atmosphere of it. Young Mottesfont was an irreclaimable vicious idiot, and Peters had been sent away from a public school for drunkenness. In four years' time our young gentleman 'was finished,' and was sent to travel with a tutor, keeping his old servant, Samuel Burton (who had learned something also), and began a career of reckless debauchery of all kinds. After two years he was angrily recalled by his father. Not very long after his return Samuel Burton married (here my father's face grew darker still). Hitherto his character, through all his master's excesses, had been most blameless. The young gentleman's father had conceived a great respect for the young man, and was glad that his wild son should have so staid and respectable a servant willing to stay with him.

A year after Samuel was married a grand crash came. The young gentleman, still a minor, was found to be awfully in debt, to have been raising money most recklessly, to have been buying jewellery and selling it again. His creditors, banding themselves together, refused to accept the plea of minority; two of their number threatened to prosecute for swindling if their claims were not settled in full. An arrangement was come to for six thousand pounds, and the young gentleman was allowanced with two hundred a year and sent abroad.

Samuel Burton, seeing that an end was come to a system of plunder which he had carried on at his young master's expense, came out in his true colours. He robbed the house of money and valuables to the amount of thirteen hundred pounds, and disappeared

— utterly and entirely disappeared — leaving his wife and child to the mercy of my father.

This was my father's account of his disappearance. He concealed from me the fact that Samuel Burton had been arrested and transported for fourteen years.

The poor mother exerted herself as well as she was able; but she had been brought up soft-handed and could do but little. When Reuben was about ten she died; my father took the boy home, and ultimately apprenticed him to a waterman.

"And now, my boy, you see why I am anxious about Reuben's coming to live with us. He comes of bad blood on both sides; and his father is, for aught I know, still alive. Reuben ain't going on as I could wish. I don't say anything against those as row races, or run races, or ride races; I only know it ain't my way, and I don't want it to be. There's too much pot'us about it for our sort, my boy; so you see I don't want him and his lot here on that account. And then he is a dapper little chap; and our Emma is very pretty and sweet, and there may be mischief there again. Still, I can't refuse him. I thought I was doing a kind thing to a fatherless lad in calling him cousin, but I almost wish I hadn't now. So I say to you, keep him at a distance. Don't let him get too intimate in our part of the house. Good night, old man."

"Where are you going to put him, father?"

"As far off as I can," said my father. "In the big room at the top of the house."

"In the ghost's room?" said I. And I went to bed, and dreamt of Reuben being woke in the night by a little old lady in grey shot silk and black mittens,

who came and sat on his bed and knitted at him. For, when my mother was confined with Fred, Mrs. Quickly was in attendance and told us of such an old lady in the attic aloft there, and had confirmed her story by an appeal to Miss Tearsheet, then in seclusion, in consequence of a man having been beaten to death by Mr. Pistol and others. We were very few doors from Alsatia in those times!

CHAPTER IV.

The Colonial Secretary sees snakes and other Vermin.

It was a hard hit in a tender place for the Colonial Secretary. He had started in life as the younger son of a Worcestershire squire, and had fought his way, inch by inch, up to fame, honour, and wealth. He was shrewd, careful enough of the main chance, and very ambitious; but, besides this, he was a good-hearted affectionate fellow; and one of his objects of ambition had been to have a quiet and refined home, wherein he might end his days in honour, presided over by a wife who was in every way worthy of him. Perhaps he had been too much engaged in money-making, perhaps he had plunged too fiercely into politics, perhaps he had never found a woman who exactly suited him; but so it was — he had postponed his domestic scheme to his other schemes, until he was two-and-forty, and might have postponed it longer, had he not met Agnes Neville, at a geological picnic, in the crater of Necnicabarla. Here was everything to be wished for: beauty, high breeding, sweet temper, and the highest connexion. Four of her beautiful sisters had married before her, every one of them to

one of the best-bred and richest squatters in that wealthy colony. Mrs. Morton of Jip Jip, Mrs. Hill of Macandemdah, the Honourable Mrs. Pakenham of Langi Cal Cal; and lastly, the beautiful and witty Mrs. Somerton of Lal Lal and Pywheitjork.* He fell in love with Miss Neville at once; their marriage was delayed, principally on account of troublesome political reasons, for six months, and in that time he had got to love, like a brother, her little sister, Gerty Neville, and the last and most beautiful of the six beautiful sisters. Even before he was married, he and Agnes had laid out all sorts of plans for her future settlement. He had even a scheme for taking her to Paris, getting her properly dressed there, and pitching her into the London season, under the auspices of his mother, as a gauntlet to English beauty.

It was a hard hit for him. He had always been so especially hard on a certain kind of young English gentleman, who has sailed too close to the wind at home, and who comes to the colony to be whitewashed. He had fulminated against that sort of thing so strongly. From his place in the House he had denounced it time after time. That his colony, his own colony, which he had helped to make, was to become a sewer or sink for all the rubbish of the old country! How he had protested against and denounced that principle, whether applied to male or female emigrants; and now Gerty was proposing to marry a man, whom he was very much inclined to quote as one of the most offensive examples of it.

And another provoking part of the business was, that he would have little or no sympathy. The colony

* One would not dare to invent these names. They are all real.

would say that the youngest Miss Neville had made a great catch, and married better than any of her sisters. The fellow would be a baronet with 10,000*l.* a year. There was a certain consolation in that — a considerable deal of consolation; if it had not been that the Secretary loved her, that might have made him tolerably contented with her lot. But he loved her; and the man, were he fifty baronets, was a low fellow of loose character; and it was very hot; and so the Secretary was discontented.

Very hot. The tide out, leaving a band of burning sand, a quarter of a mile broad, between sea and shore. Where he had struck the sea first, at Wooriallock Point, the current, pouring seaward off the spit of sand, had knocked up a trifling surf, which chafed and leaped in tiny waves, and looked crisp, and cool, and aerated. But, now he was in the lone bight of the bay, the sea was perfectly smooth and oily, deadly silent and calm, under the blazing sun. The water did not break upon the sand, but only now and then sneaked up a few feet with a lazy whisper. Before him for twelve miles or more were the long level yellow sands, without one single break as far as the eye could reach; on his right the glassy sea, gleaming under the background of a heavy slow-sailing thunder cloud; and on his left the low wall of dark evergreen shrubs, which grew densely to the looser and drier sands that lay piled in wind-heaps beyond the reach of the surf.

Once his horse shied; it was at a black snake, which had crept down to bathe, and which raised its horrible wicked head from out its coils and hissed at him as he went by. Another time he heard a strange rippling noise, coming from the glassy surfless sea on

his right. It was made by a shark, which, coming swiftly, to all appearance, from under the dark thunder-cloud, headed shoreward, making the spray fly in a tiny fountain from his back-fin which was visible above the surface. As he came on, the smaller fish, snappers and such like, hurled themselves out of the water in hundreds, making the sea alive for one instant; but after that the shark, and the invisible fish he was in pursuit of, sped seaward again; the ripple they had made died out on the face of the water, and the water in the bay was calm, still, and desolate once more.

Intolerably lonely. He pushed his horse into a canter, to make a breeze for himself which the heavens denied him. Still only the long weary stretch of sand, the sea on the right, and the low evergreens on the left.

But now far, far ahead, a solitary dot upon the edge of the gleaming water, which, as the good horse threw the ground behind him, grew larger and larger. Yes, it *was* a man who toiled steadily on in the same direction the Secretary was going — a man who had his trousers off, and was walking bare-legged on the edge of the sea to cool his feet; a man who looked round from time to time, as if to see who was the horseman behind him.

The Secretary reined up beside him with a cheery "Good day," and the man respectfully returned the salutation. The Secretary recognized his man in an instant, but held his tongue.

He was a tall narrow-shouldered man, who might have been forty or might have been sixty; as with most other convicts, his age was a profound mystery. You could see that he had been originally what some

people, hasty observers, would call a good-looking young man, and was even now what those same hasty observers would call a good-looking middle-aged man. His hair was grey, and he had that wonderfully clear dark-brown complexion which one sees so continually among old convicts who have been much in the bush. His forehead was high and bald, and his nose was very long delicate, and aquiline — so much was in his favour; but then — why, all the lower part of his face, upper lip, mouth, lower lip and all, were pinched up in a heap under the long nose. When I read "Little Dorrit," I was pleased to find that Mr. Dickens was describing in the person of M. Rigaud one of our commonest types of convict face, but Frenchified and wearing a moustache, and was pleased also to see that, with his wonderfully close observation, he had not committed the mistake of making his man a brave and violent villain, but merely a cunning one.

The Secretary looked down on the bald head and the Satanic eyebrows, which ran down from high above the level of the man's ears and nearly met above his great transparent hook nose, and said to himself, "Well, you are a more ill-looking scoundrel than I thought you the other day, though you did look a tolerable rogue then."

The man saw that the Secretary had recognised him, and the Secretary saw that he saw it; but they both ignored the fact. It was so lonely on these long sands, that the Secretary looked on this particular scoundrel as if he were a rather interesting book which he had picked up, and which would beguile the way.

"Hot day, my man."

"Very hot, your honour; but, if that thunder-cloud will work up to us from the west, we shall have the south wind up in the tail of it, as cold as ice. Your honour will excuse my walking like this. I looked round and saw you had no ladies with you."

Not at all an unpleasant or coarse voice. A rather pleasing voice, belonging to a person who had mixed with well-bred people at some time or another.

"By Jove," said the Secretary, "don't apologise, my man. I rather envy you. But look out for the snakes. I have seen two on the edge of the salt water; you must be careful with your bare feet."

"I saw the two you speak of, sir, a hundred yards off. I have a singularly quick eye. It is possible, your honour, that if I had been transported a dozen years earlier I might have made a good bushman. I was too effeminately bred also, Mr. Secretary. I was spoilt too young by *your* class, Mr. Secretary, or I might have developed into a bolder and more terrible rogue than I am."

"What a clever dog it is!" thought the Secretary. "Knowing that he can't take me in, and yet trying to do it through a mere instinct of deceit, which has become part of his nature. And his instinct shows him that this careless frankness was the most likely dodge to me, who know everything, and more. By gad, it is a wonderful rogue!"

He thought this, but he said: "Fiddlededee about terrible rogues. You are clear now; why don't you mend your ways, man? Confound it, why don't you mend your ways?"

"I am going to," said the other. "Not, Mr. Colonial Secretary, because I am a bit a less rogue

than before, but because it will pay. Catch me tripping again, Mr. Oxton, and hang me."

"I say," said the Secretary; "you mus'n't commit yourself, you know."

"Commit myself!" said the man, with a sneer; "commit myself to *you*! Haven't I been confidential with you? Don't I know that every word I have said to you in confidence is sacred? Don't I know that what you choose to call your honour will prevent your using one word of any private conversation against me? Haven't I been brought up among such as you? Haven't I been debauched and ruined by such as you? Commit myself! I know and despise your class too well to commit myself. You *daren't* use one word I have said against me. Such as I have the pull of you there. You *daren't*, for your honour's sake."

And, as he turned his angry face upon the Secretary, he looked so much more fiendish than the snake, and so much more savage than the shark, that the Secretary rode on, saying, "Well, my man, I am sorry I said anything to offend you;" and, as he rode on, leaving the solitary figure toiling on behind him, he thought somewhat like this:

"Curious cattle, these convicts! Even the most refined of them get at times defiant and insolent, in their way. What a terrible rogue this fellow is! He saw I recognised him from the first. I hate a convict who turns Queen's evidence. I wonder where he is going. I wish I could turn him over the border. I hate having convicts loose in my little colony. It is an infernal nuisance being so close to a penal settlement; but there is no help for it. I wonder where

that rogue is making for; I wish he would make for Sydney. Where can he be going?"

One cannot help wondering what the Secretary would have said had he known, as we do, that this desperate rogue was bound on exactly the same errand as himself. That is to say, to foregather with Mr. George Hillyar, the man who was to be a baronet, and have 10,000*l.* a year, and who, God help us, was to marry Gerty Neville.

"Let me see," said the Secretary. "That fellow's real name came out on his trial. What was it? Those things are worth remembering. Samuel Barker — no, it wasn't Barker, because that's the name of the Cape Wilberforce people. Rippon, that was the name; no, it wasn't. What is his name? Ah! Rippon and — Rippon and Burton. Ah! for the man's name was Samuel Burton."

CHAPTER V.

James Burton's Story: the Ghost's Room is invaded, and James puts his Foot through the Floor.

IN due time — that is to say, a fortnight after my fifteenth birthday — we moved into the new house. It was eight o'clock on a bright summer's morning when my father got the key from Mr. Long, unlocked the gate in the broken palings which surrounded the house, and passed into the yard, surrounded by his whole awe-stricken family.

There was no discovery made in the yard. It was commonplace. A square flagged space, with a broken water-butt in one corner under an old fashioned leaden

gargoyle. There was also a grindstone, and some odd bits of timber which lay about near the pump, which was nearly grown up with nettles and rye-grass. In front of me as I stood in the yard the great house rose, flushed with the red blaze of the morning sun; behind were the family, Joe leaning on his crutch, with his great eyes staring out of his head in eager curiosity; after him the group of children, clustered around Emma, who carried in her arms my brother Fred, a large-headed stolid child of two, who was chronically black and blue in every available part of his person with accidents, and who was, even now, evidently waiting for an opportunity to distinguish himself in that line.

Joe had not long before made acquaintance with kind old Mr. Faulkner, who had coached him up in antiquities of the house; and Joe had told me everything. We boys fully expected to find Lord Essex's helmet lying on the stairs, or Queen Elizabeth's glove in the passage. So, when father opened the great paneled door, and went into the dark entry, we pushed in after him, staring in all directions, expecting to see something or another strange; in which we were disappointed. There was nothing more strange than a large entrance hall, a broad staircase, with large balustrade, somewhat rickety and out of the perpendicular, winding up one side of it to the floor above, and a long mullioned window halfway up. Our first difficulty arose from Frank, my youngest brother but one, declining to enter the house, on the grounds that Shadrach was hiding in the cellar. This difficulty being overcome, we children, leaving father and mother to inspect the ground floor, pushed upstairs in a body

to examine the delectable regions above, where you could look out of window, over Shepherd's nursery ground, and see the real trees waving in the west.

On reaching the first floor, my youngest brother, Fred, so to speak, inaugurated, or opened for public traffic, the staircase, by falling down it from the top to the bottom, and being picked up black in the face, with all the skin off his elbows and knees. Our next hitch was with Frank, who refused to go any further because Abednego was in the cupboard. Emma had to sit down on the landing, and explain to him that the three holy children were not, as Frank had erroneously gathered from their names, ghosts who caught hold of your legs through the banisters as you went up-stairs, or burst suddenly upon you out of closets; but respectable men, who had been dead, lawk-a-mercy, ever so long. Joe and I left her, combating, somewhat unsuccessfully, a theory that Meshech was at present speaking up the chimney, and would immediately appear, in a cloud of soot, and frighten us all to death; and went on to examine the house.

And really we went on with something like awe upon us. There was no doubt that we were treading on the very same boards which had been trodden, often enough, by the statesmen and dandies of Queen Elizabeth's Court, and most certainly by the mighty woman herself. Joe, devourer of books, had, with Mr. Faulkner's assistance, made out the history of the house; and he had communicated his enthusiasm even to me, the poor simple blacksmith's boy. So when we, too, went into the great room on the first floor, even I, stupid lad, cast my eyes eagerly around to see

whether anything remained of the splendour of the grand old court, of which I had heard from Joe.

Nothing. Not a bit of furniture. Three broad windows, which looked westward. A broad extent of shaky floor, an immense fire-place, and over it a yellow dingy old sampler, under a broken glass, hanging all on one side on a rusty nail.

Joe pounced upon this at once, and devoured it. "Oh, Jim! Jim!" he said to me, "just look at this. I wonder who she was?"

"There's her name to it, old man," I answered. "I expect that name's hern, ain't it? For," I said hesitatingly, seeing that Joe was excited about it, and feeling that I ought to be so myself, though 'not knowing why — "for, old man, if they'd forged her name, maybe they'd have done it in another coloured worsted."

This bringing forth no response, I felt that I was not up to the occasion; I proceeded to say that worsteds were uncommon hard to match, which ask our Emma, when Joe interrupted me.

"I don't mean that, Jim. I mean what was her history. Did she write it herself, or who wrote it for her? What a strange voice from the grave it is. Age eighteen; date 1686; her name Alice Hillyar. And then underneath, in black, one of her beautiful sisters has worked, 'She dyed 3d December, that yeare.' She is dead, Jim, many a weary year ago, and she did this when she was eighteen years old. If one could only know her history, eh? She was a lady. Ladies made these common samplers in those times. See, here is Emma. Emma, dear, see what I have found. Take and read it out to Jim."

Emma, standing in the middle of the deserted room, with the morning sunlight on her face, and with the rosy children clustering round her, read it out to us. She, so young, so beautiful, so tender and devoted, stood there, and read out to us the words of a girl, perhaps as good and as devoted as she was, who had died a hundred and fifty years before. Even I, dull boy as I was, felt there was something strange and out-of-the-way in hearing the living girl reading aloud the words of the girl who had died so long ago. I thought of it then; and I thought of it years after, when Erne and I sat watching a dim blue promontory for the smoke of a tiny steamer to stain the summer sky.

It was but poor doggrel that Emma read out to us. First came the letters of the alphabet; then the numbers; then a house and some fir-trees; then —

“Weep not, sweet friends, my early doom.
Lay not fresh flowers upon my tomb;
But elder sour and briony,
And yew bough broken from the tree.
My sisters kind and beautiful!
My brothers brave and dutiful!
My mother deare, beat not thy breast,
Thy hunchbacked daughter is at rest.
See, friends, I am not loath to go;
My Lord will take me, that I know.”

Poor as it was, it pleased Joe; and as I had a profound belief in Joe's good taste, I was pleased also. I thought it somewhat in the tombstone line myself, and fell into the mistake of supposing that one was to admire it on critical rather than on sentimental grounds. Joe hung it up over his bed, and used to sit up in the night and tell me stories about the young lady,

whom he made a clothes-peg on which he hung every fancy of his brain.

He took his yellow sampler to kind old Mr. Faulkner, who told him that our new house, Church Place, had been the family place of the Hillyars at the close of the seventeenth century. And then the old man put on his hat, took his stick, called his big dog, and, taking Joe by the hand, led him to that part of the old church burial-ground which lies next the river; and there he showed him her grave. She lay in that fresh breezy corner which overlooks the flashing busy river, all alone. "Alice Hillyar; born 1668, died 1686." Her beautiful sisters lay elsewhere, and the brave brothers also; though, by a beautiful fiction, they were all represented on the family tomb in the chancel, kneeling one behind the other. It grew to be a favourite place with Joe, this grave of the hunchback girl, which overlooked the tide; and Emma would sit with him there sometimes. And then came one and joined them, and talked soft and low to Emma, whose foot would often dally with the letters of his own surname on the worn old stone.

The big room quite came up to our expectations. We examined all the other rooms on the same floor; then we examined the floor above; and, lastly, Joe said:

"Jim, are you afraid to go up into the ghost's room?"

"N — no," I said; "I don't mind in the day time."

"When Rube comes," said Joe, "we shan't be let to it; so now or never."

We went up very silently. The door was ajar,

and we peeped in. It was nearly bare and empty, with only a little nameless lumber lying in one corner. It was high for an attic, in consequence of the high pitch of the roof, and not dark, though there was but one window to it; this window being a very large dormer, taking up nearly half the narrow end of the room. The ceiling was, of course, lean-to, but at a slighter angle to the floor than is usual.

But what struck us immediately was, that this room long as it was, did not take up the whole of the attic story. And looking towards the darker end of the room, we thought we could make out a door. We were afraid to go near it, for it would not have been very pleasant to have it open suddenly, and for a little old lady, in grey shot silk and black mittens, to come popping out on you. We, however, treated the door with great suspicion, and I kept watch on it while Joe looked out of window.

When it came to my turn to look out of window, Joe kept watch. I looked right down on the top of the trees in the Rectory garden; beyond the Rectory I could see the new tavern, the Cadogan Arms, and away to the north-east St. Luke's Church. It was a pleasant thing to look, as it were, down the chimneys of the Black Lion, and over them into the Rectory garden. The long walk of pollard limes, the giant acacias, and the little glimpse of the lawn between the boughs, was quite a new sight to me. I was enjoying the view, when Joe said:

"Can you see the Cadogan Arms?"

"Yes."

"I wonder what the Earl of Essex would have thought if —"

At this moment there was a rustling of silk in the dark end of the room, and we both, as the Yankees say, "up stick" and bolted. Even in my terror I am glad to remember that I let Joe go first, though he could get along with his crutch pretty nearly as fast as I could. We got downstairs as quick as possible, and burst in on the family, with the somewhat premature intelligence, that we had turned out the ghost, and that she was, at that present moment, coming downstairs in grey shot silk and black mittens.

There was an immediate rush of the younger ones towards my mother and Emma, about whom they clustered like bees. Meanwhile my father stepped across to the shop for a trifle of a striking hammer, weight eighteen pounds, and, telling me to follow him, went upstairs. I obeyed, in the first place, because his word was law to me, and, in the second, because in his company I should not have cared one halfpenny for a whole regiment of old ladies in grey silk. We went upstairs rapidly, and I followed him into the dark part of the room.

We were right in supposing we had seen a door. There it was, hasped — or as my father said, hapsed — up and covered with cobwebs. After two or three blows from the hammer it came open, and we went in.

The room we entered was nearly as large as the other, but dark, save for a hole in the roof. In one corner was an old tressel bed, and at its head a tattered curtain which rustled in the wind, and accounted for our late panic. I was just beginning to laugh at this, when I gave a cry of terror, for my right foot had gone clean through the boards.

My father pulled me out laughing; but I had hurt

my knee, and had to sit down. My father knelt down to look at it; when he had done so, he looked at the hole I had made.

"An ugly hole in the boards, old man; we must tell Rube about it, or he'll break his leg, maybe. What a depth there is between the floor and the ceiling below!" he said, feeling with his hammer; "I never did, *surely*."

After which he carried me downstairs, for I had hurt my knee somewhat severely, and did not get to work for a week or more.

When father made his appearance among the family, carrying me in his arms, there was a wild cry from the assembled children. My mother requested Emma to put the door-key down her back; and then, seeing that I was really hurt, said that she felt rather better, and that Emma needn't.

Some one took me from my father, and said, in a pleasant cheery voice:

"Hallo! here's our Jim been a-trotting on the loose stones without his knee-caps. Hold up, old chap, and don't cry; I'll run round to the infant-school for a pitch-plaster, and call at the doctor's shop as I go for the fire-engine. That's about our little game, unless you think it necessary for me to order a marvel tomb at the greengrocer's. Not a-going to die this bout? I thought as much."

I laughed. We always laughed at Reuben — a sort of small master in the art of cockney chaff; which chaff consisted in putting together a long string of incongruities in a smart jerky tone of voice. This, combined with consummate impudence; a code of honour which, though somewhat peculiar, is rarely violated;

a reckless, though persistent, courage; and, generally speaking, a fine physique, are those better qualities of the Londoner ("cockney," as those call him who don't care for two black eyes, *et cetera*), which make him, in rough company, more respected and "let alone" than any other class of man with whom I am acquainted. The worst point in his character, the point which spoils him, is his distrust for high motives. His horizon is too narrow. You cannot get him on any terms to allow the existence of high motives in others. And, where he himself does noble and generous things (as he does often enough, to my knowledge), he hates being taxed with them, and invariably tries to palliate them by imputing low motives to himself. If one wanted to be fanciful, one would say that the descendant of the old London 'prentice had inherited his grandsires' distrust for the clergy and the aristocracy, who were to the city folk, not so intimate with them as the country folk, the representatives of lofty profession and imperfect practice. However this may be, your Londoner's chief fault, in the present day, is his distrust of pretensions to religion and chivalrous feeling. He can be chivalrous and religious at times; but you must hold your tongue about it.

Reuben was an average specimen of a town-bred lad; he had all their virtues and vices *in petto*. He was a gentle, good-humoured little fellow, very clever, very brave, very kind-hearted, very handsome in a way, with a flat-sided head and regular features. The fault, as regarded his physical beauty, was that he was always "making faces" — "shaving," as my father used to call it. He never could keep his mouth still. He was always biting his upper lip or his under lip,

or chewing a straw, or spitting in an unnecessary manner. If he could have set that mouth into a good round No, on one or two occasions, and kept it so, it would have been better for all of us.

CHAPTER VI.

James Burton's Story: the Preliminaries to the Momentous Expedition to Stanlake.

THAT same year also, Joe and I made a new acquaintance, in this manner: —

It had become evident to me, who had watched Joe so long, that his lameness was to some slight extent on the mend. I began to notice that, in the case of our getting into a fight in the street (no uncommon case among the Chelsea street-children, even in this improved age, as I am given to understand), and being driven to retreat, he began to make much better weather of it. I was pleased to find this, for nothing on earth could have prevented his following me at a certain distance to see how I was getting on. The first time I noticed a decided improvement was this. We (Church Street — Burtons, Chittles, Holmeses, Agars, &c.) were at hot feud with Danvers Street on the west side of us, and Lawrence Street on the east. Lawrence Street formed a junction with Danvers Street by Lombard Street; and so, when we went across the end of the space now called Paulton Square, we came suddenly on the enemy, three to one. The affair was short, but decisive. Everything that skill and valour could do was done, but it was useless. We fled silent and swift, and the enemy followed, howling. When round the

first corner, to my astonishment, there was Joe, in the thick and press of the disordered ranks, with his crutch over his shoulder, getting along in a strange waddling way, but at a most respectable pace. The next moment my fellow-apprentice and I had him by his arms and hurried him along between us until the pursuit ceased, the retreat stopped, and we were in safety.

I thought a great deal about this all the rest of the day. I began to see that, if it were possible to strengthen the poor lad's leg by gradual abandonment of the crutch, a much brighter future was before him. I determined to try.

"Joe, old fellow," I said as soon as we were in bed, "have you got a story for us?"

"No," he said, "I haven't. I am thinking of something else, Jim."

"What about?"

"About the country. The country is here within three miles of us. I have been asking Rube about it. He says he goes miles up the river into it in his lighter. Real country, you knows — stiles, and foot-paths, and cows, and all of it. You and me has never seen it. Lets we go."

"But," I said, "what's the good? That there crutch of yourn (that's the way I used to talk in those old times) would prevent you getting there; and, when you got there, old chap, you couldn't get about. And, if the cows was to run after you, you couldn't hook it over the gates and stiles, and such as you talks on. Therefore I ask you, What's the good?"

"But the cows," urged Joe, "don't allus come rampaging at you, end on, do em? (That is the way our orator used to speak at twelve years old.)

"Most times they does, I reckon," I replied, and turned myself over to sleep, almost afraid that I had already said too much "about that there crutch of hisn." I had become aware of the fact that crutches grew, ready made, in Shepherd's nursery-ground, in rows like gooseberry trees, and was on the eve of some fresh discoveries in the same line, when Joe awoke me.

"Jim," he said, "Rube's barge goes up on the tide to-morrow morning; let us see whether or no we can get a holiday and go."

I assented, though I thought it doubtful that my father would give us leave. A month or so before he would have refused our request point-blank. Indeed I should not have taken the trouble to ask him, but I had noticed that he had softened considerably towards Reuben. Reuben was so gentle and affectionate, and so respectful to my father and mother, that it was impossible not to yield in some way; and so Reuben was more and more often asked into our great kitchen on the ground floor, when he was heard passing at night up to his solitary chamber in the roof.

At this time I began first to notice his singular devotion to my sister Emma — a devotion which surprised me, as coming from such a feather-headed being as Reuben, who was by no means addicted to the softer emotions. I saw my father look rather uneasily at them sometimes, but his face soon brightened up again. It was only the admiring devotion of a man to a beautiful child. Reuben used to consult her on every possible occasion, and implicitly follow her advice. He told me once that, if you came to that,

Emma had more head-piece than the whole lot of us put together.

My father gave us his leave; and at seven o'clock, on the sweet May morning, we started on our first fairy voyage up the river, in a barge full of gravel, navigated by the drunken one-eyed old man who had been Rube's master. It was on the whole the most perfectly delightful voyage I ever took. There is no craft in the world so comfortable as a coal barge. It has absolutely no motion whatever about it; you glide on so imperceptibly that the banks seem moving, and you seem still. Objects grow slowly on the eye, and then slowly fade again; and they say, "We have passed so and so," when all the time it would seem more natural to say, "So and so has passed us."

This was the first voyage Joe and I ever took together. We have made many voyages and journeys since, and have never found the way long while we were together; we shall have to make the last journey of all, separate, but we shall meet again at the end of it.

Oh, glorious and memorable Mayday! New wonders and pleasures at every turn. The river swept on smoothly without a ripple, past the trim villa lawns, all ablaze with flowers; and sometimes under tall dark trees, which bent down into the water, and left no shore. Joe was in a frantic state of anxiety to know all the different kinds of trees by sight, as he did by name. Reuben, the good-natured, was nearly as pleased as ourselves, and at last "finished" Joe by pointing out to him a tulip-tree in full bloom. Joe was silent after this. He kept recurring to this tulip-tree all the rest of the day at intervals; and the last words I heard

that night, on dropping to sleep, were, "But after all there was nothing like the tulip-tree."

In one long reach, I remember, we heard something coming towards us on the water, with a measured rushing noise, very swiftly; and, before we could say, What was it? it was by us, and gone far away. We had a glimpse of a brown thin-faced man, seated in a tiny outrigger, which creaked beneath the pressure of each mighty stroke, skimming over the water like a swallow, with easy undulations, so fast that the few swift runners on the bank were running their hardest. "Robert Coombes training," said Reuben with bated breath; and we looked after the flying figure with awe and admiration, long after it was gone round the bend, and the gleaming ripples which he had made upon the oily river had died into stillness once more.

I hardly remember, to tell the truth, how far we went up with that tide; I think, as far as Kew. When the kedge was dropped, we all got into a boat, and went ashore to a public-house. I remember perfectly well that I modestly asked the one-eyed old man, lately Rube's master, whether he would be pleased to take anything. He was pleased to put a name to gin and cloves, which he drank in our presence, to Joe's intense interest, who leant on his crutch, and stared at him intently with his great prominent eyes. Joe had heard of the old man's extraordinary performances when in liquor, and he evidently expected this particular dram to produce immediate and visible effects. He was disappointed. The old man assaulted nobody (he probably missed his wife), ordered another dram, wiped his mouth on the back of his hand, swore an ingenious

oath perfectly new to the whole of his audience, lit his pipe, and sat down on a bench fronting the river.

Then, after a most affectionate farewell with Reuben, we turned to walk homewards — Joe walking stoutly and bravely with his crutch over his shoulder. We enjoyed ourselves more on shore than on the river, for Joe said that there were wild tulips on Kew Green, and wanted to find some.* So we hunted for them, but without success. The tulip-tree at Fulham had given me incorrect ideas, and I steadily looked up into the limes and horse-chestnuts for them. Then we pushed on again, and at the turnpike on Barnes Common we took our first refreshment that day. We had some bread and treacle in a cotton pocket-handkerchief, and we bought two bottles of ginger beer; and, for the first time in our lives, we “pic-nic’d.” We sat on the short turf together, and ate our bread and treacle, and drank our ginger-beer.

Last year, when Joe and I came over to the Exhibition as Commissioners, we, as part of our duty, were invited to dine with one of the greatest men in England. I sat between Mrs. Oxton and a Marchioness. And during dinner, in a low tone of voice I told Mrs. Oxton this story about the bread and treacle, and the ginger-beer. And, to my surprise, and rather to my horror, as I must confess, Mrs. Oxton, speaking across me, told the other story over again to the Marchioness, of whom I was in mortal terror. But, after this, nothing could be more genial and kind to me than was that terrible Marchioness; and in the drawing-

* Joe was to a certain extent right. The common *Fritillaria* *did* grow there — fifty years before Joe was born. He had seen the locality quoted in some old botany-book.

room, I saw her with my own eyes, go and tell the whole horrid truth to her husband, the Marquis. Whereupon he came over at once, and made much of me, in a corner. Their names, as I got them from Mrs. Oxton, were Lord and Lady Hainault.

Then we (on Putney Common twenty years ago) lay back and looked at the floating clouds, and Joe said, "Reuben is going to marry our Emma, and I am glad of it."

"But he mustn't," I said; "it won't do."

"Why not?"

"Father won't hear on it, I tell you Rube ain't going on well."

"Yes, he is now," said Joe, "since he's been seeing so much of Emma. Don't you notice, Jim? He hasn't sworn an oath to-day. He has cut all that Cheyne Walk gang. I tell you she will make a man of him."

"I tell you," I said, "father won't hear tell on it. Besides, she's only fourteen. And, also, who is fit to marry Emma? Go along with you."

And so we went along with us. And our first happy holiday came to an end by my falling asleep dog-tired at supper, with my head in my father's lap; while Joe, broad-awake, and highly excited, was telling them all about the tulip-tree. I was awakened by the screams incident on Fred having fallen triumphantly into the fire, off his chair, and having to be put out — which being done, we went to bed.

After this first effort of ours, you might as well have tried to keep two stormy petrels at home in a gale of wind, as to keep Joe and me from rambling. My father "declined" — I can hardly use such a

strong word as "refuse" about him — any more holidays; but he compromised the matter by allowing us to go an expedition into the country on Sunday afternoon — providing always that we went to church in the morning with the rest of the family — to which we submitted, though it cost us a deal in omnibuses.

And now I find that, before I can tell you the story of our new acquaintance in an artistic manner, I shall have to tell you what became of that old acquaintance of ours — Joe's crutch; because, if we had not got rid of the one, we never should have made acquaintance with the other.

On every expedition we made into the country, Joe used his crutch less and less. I mean, used it less in a legitimate manner; though, indeed, we missed it in the end, as one does miss things one has got used to. He *used* it certainly to the last. I have known him dig out a mole with it; I have known him successfully defend himself against a dog with it in a farmyard at Roehampton; I have seen it flying up, time after time, into a horse-chestnut tree (we tried them roasted and boiled, with salt and without, but it wouldn't do) until it lodged, and we wasted the whole Sabbath afternoon in pelting it down again. Latterly, I saw Joe do every sort and kind of thing with that crutch, except one. He never used it to walk with. Once he broke it short in two getting over a stile; and my father sent it to the umbrella-mender's and had it put together at a vast expense with a ferrule, and kept Joe from school till it was done. I saw that the thing was useless long before the rest of the family. But, at last, the end of it came, and the old familiar sound of it was heard no more.

One Sunday afternoon we got away as far as Penge Wood, where the Crystal Palace now stands; and in a field, between that and Norwood, we found mushrooms, and filled a handkerchief with them. When we were coming home through Battersea, we sat down on a bank to see if any of them were broken; after which we got up and walked home again. And then and there Joe forgot his crutch, and left it behind him on the bank, and we never saw it any more, but walked home very fast for fear we should be late for supper. That was the last of the crutch, unless the one Joe saw in the marine storekeeper's in Battersea was the same one, which you may believe or not as you like. All I know is, that he never got a new one, and has not done so to this day.

We burst in with our mushrooms. Father and mother had waited for us, and were gone to bed; Emma was sitting up for us, with Harry on her knee; and, as Joe came towards her, she turned her sweet face on me, and said, "Why, where is Joe's crutch?"

"It's two miles off, sweetheart," I said. "He has come home without it. He'll never want no crutch this side of the grave."

I saw her great soul rush into her eyes as she turned them on me; and then, with that strange way she had, when anything happened, of looking out for some one to praise, instead of, as many women do, looking out for some one to blame and fall foul of, she said to me —

"This is your doing, my own brother. May God bless you for it."

She came up to bed with Harry, after us. As soon

as she had put him to bed in the next room, I heard him awake Frank his bedfellow, and tell him that Jesus had cured our Joe of his lameness.

Now, having got rid of Joe's crutch, we began to go further afield. Our country rambles were a great and acknowledged success. Joe, though terribly deformed in the body, was growing handsome and strong. What is more, Joe developed a quality, which even I should hardly have expected him to have possessed. Joe was got into a corner one day by a Danvers Street bully, and he there and then thrashed that bully. Reuben saw it, and would have interfered, had he not seen that Joe, with his gigantically long arms, had it all his own way; and so he left well alone.

We began to go further afield — sometimes going out on an omnibus, and walking home; sometimes walking all the way; Joe bringing his book-learning on natural objects to bear, and recognising things which he had never seen before. Something new was discovered in this manner every day; and one day, in a lonely pond beyond Clapham, we saw three or four white flowers floating on the surface.

"Those," said Joe, "must be white water-lilies. I would give anything for one of them."

In those days, before the river had got into its present filthy condition — in the times when you could catch a punt full of roach at Battersea Bridge, in the turn of a tide — nearly every Chelsea boy could swim.

I very soon had my clothes off, and the lilies were carried home in triumph.

"Ah, mother!" said my father, "do you remember the lilies at Stanlake?"

"Ah, father!" said my mother.

"Acres on 'em," said my father, looking round radiantly; "hundreds on 'em. Yallah ones as well. Waterfalls, and chaney boys being poorly into cockle-shells, and marvel figures dancing as naked as they was born, and blowing tunes on whilk shells, and winkles, and such like. Eh, mother!"

Mother began to cry.

"There, God bless me!" said my father; "I *am* a stupid brute if ever there were one. Mother, old girl, it were so many years ago. Come, now; it's all past and gone, dear."

Fred, at this moment, seeing his mother in tears, broke out in a stentorian, but perfectly tearless, roar, and cast his bread and butter to the four winds. Emma had to take him and walk up and down with him, patting him on the back, and singing to him in her soft cooing voice.

There was a knock at the room-door just when she was opposite it — she opened it, and there was Reuben; and I saw my father and mother look suddenly at one another.

"May I come in, cousin?" he said to my mother, in his pleasantest voice. "Come, let's have a game with the kids before I go up and sleep with the ghost."

"You're welcome, Rube, my boy," said my father; "and you're welcomer every day. We miss you, Rube, when you don't come; consequently, you're welcome when you do, which is in reason. Therefore," said my father, pursuing his argument, "there's the place by the

fire, and there's your backer, and there's the kids. So, if mother's eyes is red, it's with naught you've done, old boy. Leave alone," I heard my father growl to himself (for I, as usual, was sitting next him); "is the sins of the fathers to be visited on the tables of kindred and affinity? No. In consequence, leave alone, I tell you. *He* didn't, any how. And there was worse than his father — now then."

In a very short time we were all comfortable and merry, Reuben making the most atrocious riot with the "kids," my younger brothers. But I saw that Joe was distraught; and, with that profound sagacity which has raised me to my present eminence, I guessed that he was planning to go to Stanlake the very next Sunday.

The moment we were in bed, I saw how profoundly wise I was. Joe broke out. He must see the "yallah" water-lilies; the chaney boys and the marvel figures were nothing; it was the yallah lilies. I, who had noticed more closely than he my mother's behaviour when the place was mentioned, and the look she gave my father when Rube came in, had a sort of fear of going there, but Joe pleaded and pleaded until I was beaten; at last, I happily remembered that we did not know in which of the fifty-two counties of England Stanlake was situated. I mentioned this little fact to Joe. He suggested that I should ask my father. I declined doing anything of the sort; and so the matter ended for the night.

But Joe was not to be beaten. He came home later than usual from afternoon school next day. The moment we were alone together, he told me that he had been to see Mr. Faulkner. That he had asked

him where Stanlake was; and that the old gentleman — who knew every house and its history, within twenty miles of London — had told him that it was three miles from Croydon, and was the seat of Sir George Hillyar.

CHAPTER VII.

The Battle of Barker's Gap.

THE Secretary rode steadily on across the broad sands by the silent sea, thinking of Gerty Neville, of how hot it was, of George Hillyar, of the convict he had left behind, of all sorts of things, until Cape Wilberforce was so near that it changed from a dull blue to a light brown, with gleams of green; and was no more a thing of air, but a real promontory, with broad hanging lawns of heath, and deep shadowed recesses among the cliffs. Then he knew that the forty-mile beach was nearly past, and that he was within ten miles of his journey's end and dinner. He whistled a tune, and began looking at the low wall of evergreen shrubs to his right.

At last, dray-tracks in the sand, and a road leading up from the shore through the tea-scrub, into which he passed inland. Hotter than ever here. Piles of drifted sand, scored over in every direction with the tracks of lizards of every sort and size; some of which slid away with a muscular kind of waddle, into dark places; while others, refusing to move, opened their mouths at him, or let down bags under their chins, to frighten him. A weird sort of a place this, very snaky in appearance; not by any means the sort of place to lie down and go

to sleep in on a hot night in March or September, when the wicked devils are abroad at night. Did any one of my readers ever lay down, dog-tired, on Kanonook Island, and hear the wretches sliding through the sand all night, with every now and then a subdued "Hish, hish, hish?" As the American gentleman says in "Martin Chuzzlewit," "Darn all manner of vermin."

At nightfall, he came to a little cattle-station, where he slept. It was owned by a little grey-headed Irish gentleman, who played the bassoon, and who had not one grievance, but fifty; who had been an ill-used man ever since he was born — nay, even, like Tristram Shandy, before. He had been unfortunate, had this Irish gentleman, in love, in literature, in commerce, and in politics; in his domestic relations, in his digestion; in Ireland, in India, in the Cape, and in New Zealand; still more unfortunate, according to his own showing, in Cooksland. He told all his grievances to the Secretary, proving clearly, as unsuccessful Irish gentlemen always can do, that it was not his own fault, but that things in general had combined against him. Then he asked for a place in the Customs for his second son. Lastly, he essayed to give him a tune on his bassoon; but the mason-flies had built their nests in it, and he had to clean them out with the worm-end of a ramrod; and so there was another grievance, as bad as any of the others. The Secretary had to go to bed without his music, and, indeed, had been above an hour asleep before the Irish gentleman succeeded in clearing the instrument. Then, after several trials, he managed to get a good bray out of it, got out his music-books, and set to work in good earnest, within

four feet of the Secretary's head, and nothing but a thin board between them.

The country mended as he passed inland. He crossed a broad half-salt creek, within a hundred yards of the shore, where the great bream basked in dozens; and then he was among stunted gum-trees, looking not so very much unlike oaks, and deep bracken fern. After this he came to a broad plain of yellow grass, which rolled up and up before him into a down; and, when he came, after a dozen miles, to the top of this, he looked into a broad bare valley, through which wound a large creek, fringed by a few tall white-stemmed trees, of great girth.

Beneath him were three long, low grey buildings of wood, placed so as to form three sides of a square, fronting the creek; and behind, stretching up the other side of the valley, was a large paddock, containing seven or eight fine horses. This was the police-station, at which Lieutenant Hillyar had been quartered for some time — partly, it was said, in punishment for some escapade, and partly because two desperate escaped convicts from Van Diemen's Land were suspected to be in the neighbourhood. Here George Hillyar had been thrown into the Society of the Barkers, at whose house he had met Gerty Neville.

The Secretary reined his horse up in the centre of the little quadrangle, and roared out, Hallo! Whereupon a horse neighed in the paddock, but no effect was produced.

He then tried a loud Cooe! This time the cat jumped up from where she lay in the sun, and ran indoors, and the horses in the paddock began galloping.

"Hallo! Hi! Here! Stable guard! Where the deuce have you all got to? Hallo!"

It was evident that there was not a soul about the place. The Secretary was very angry. "I'll report him; sure as he's born, I'll report him. It is too bad. It is beyond anything I ever heard of — to leave his station without a single man."

The Secretary got off his horse, and entered the principal room. He looked round in astonishment, and gave a long whistle. His bushman's eye told him, in one instant, that there had been an alarm or emergency of some kind, immediately after daybreak, while the men were still in bed. The mattresses and clothes were not rolled neatly up as usual, but the blankets were lying in confusion, just as the men had left them, when they had jumped out to dress. The carbines and swords were gone from the rack. He ran hurriedly out, and swung himself on to his horse, exclaiming, just as he would have done four-and-twenty years before at Harrow,

"Well! Here *is* a jolly row."

It was a bare three miles to the Barkers' Station over the hill. In twenty minutes he came thundering into their courtyard, and saw a pretty little woman, dressed in white, standing in front of the door, with a pink parasol over her head, holding by the hand a child, with nothing on but its night-shirt.

"My dear creature," cried the Secretary, "what the dickens is the matter?"

"Five bushrangers," cried Mrs. Barker. "They appeared suddenly last night, and stuck up the O'Malleys' station. There is nobody killed. There was no one in the house but Lesbia Burke — who is inside

now — old Miles O'Malley, and the housekeeper. They got safe away when they saw them coming. They spared the men's huts, but have burnt the house down."

"Bad cess to them," said a harsh, though not unpleasant voice, behind her; and out came a tall, rather grey-headed woman, in age about fifty, but with remains of what must have been remarkable beauty. "Bad cess to them, I say, Mr. Oxton dear. 'Tis the third home I have been burnt out of in twenty years. Is there sorra a statesman among ye' all can give a poor old Phoenix beauty a house where she may die in peace? Is this your model colony, Secretary? Was it for this that I keened over the cold hearthstone at Garoopna, when we sold it to the Brentwoods, before brave Sam Buckley came a-wooing there, to win the beauty of the world? Take me back to Gippsland some of ye, and let me hear old Snowy growling through his boulders again, through the quiet summer's night; or take me back to Old Ireland, and let me set sewing by the Castle window again, watching the islands floating on Corrib, or the mist driving up from the Atlantic before the west wind. Is this your model colony? Is there to be no pillow secure for the head of the jaded, despised old Dublin flirt, who has dressed, and dizened, and painted, and offered herself, till she became a scorn and a by-word? A curse on all your colonies! Old Ireland is worth more than all of them. A curse on them!"

"My dear Miss Burke! My dear Lesbia!" pleaded the Secretary.

"Don't talk to me. Hav'nt I been burnt out three times, by blacks and by whites? Hav'nt I had to fight

for my life like a man? Don't I bear the marks of it? There is no rest for me. I know the noise of it too well; I heard it last night. Darkness, silence, sleep, and dreams of rest. Then the hoofs on the gravel, and the beating at the door. Then the awakening, and the terror, and the shots, stabs, blows, and curses. Then murder in the drawing-room, worse in the hall. Blood on the hearthstone, and fire on the roof-tree. Don't I know it all, James Oxtan?"

"Dear Lesbia," said the good-natured Secretary, "old friend, do be more calm."

"Calm, James Oxtan, and another home gone? Tell me, have you ever had your house burnt down? Do Agnes or Gerty know what it is to have their homes destroyed, and all their little luxuries broken and dispersed, their flowers trampled, and their birds killed? Do they know this?"

"Why, no," said the Secretary.

"And, if it were to happen to them, how would you feel?"

"Well, pretty much as you do, I suppose. Yes, I don't know but what I should get cross."

"Then, vengeance, good Secretary, vengeance! Honour and high rewards to the vermin-hunters; halters and death for the vermin."

And so Miss Burke went in, her magnificently-shaped head seeming to float in the air as she went, and her glorious figure showing some new curve of the infinitely variable curves of female beauty at every step. And it was high time she should go in; for the kind, good, honest soul was getting too much excited, and was talking more than was good for her. She had her faults, and was, as you see above, very much given

to a Celtic-Danish-Milesian-Norman way of expressing herself, which is apt to be classified, on this side of St. George's Channel, as Irish rant. But her rant had a good deal of reason in it — which some Irish rant has not — and, moreover, was delivered with such magnificent accessories of voice and person, that James Oxton himself had been heard to declare that he would at any time walk twenty miles to see Lesbia Burke in a tantrum. Even, also, if you are heathen enough to believe that the whole art of rhetoric merely consists in plausibly overstating your case, with more or less dishonesty, as the occasion demands, or your conscience will allow, yet still you must admit that her rhetoric was successful — for this reason: it produced on the Colonial Secretary exactly the effect she wished; it made him horribly angry. Those taunts of hers about his model colony were terribly hard hitting. Had not His Excellency's speech at the opening of the Houses contained — nay, mainly consisted of — a somewhat offensive comparison between Cooksland and the other five colonies of the Australian group; in which the perfect security of life and property at home was contrasted with the fearful bushranger outrages in New South Wales. And now their turn had come — Cooksland's turn — the turn of James Oxton, who had made Cooksland, and who *was* Cooksland. And to meet the storm there were only four troopers and cadets in command of Lieutenant Hillyar, the greatest fool in the service.

“Oh, if that fellow will only bear himself like a man this one day!” said the Secretary, as he rode swiftly along. “Oh for Wyatt, or Malone, or Maclean, or Dixon, for one short hour! Oh, to get the thing

snuffed out suddenly and sharply, and be able to say, 'That is the way *we* manage matters.'"

One, two, three — four — five — six, seven, eight shots in the distance, sounding dully through the dense forest. Then silence, then two more shots; and muttering, half as a prayer, half as an exclamation, "God save us!" he dashed through the crowded timber as fast as his noble horse would carry him.

He was cutting off an angle in the road, and, soon after he joined it again, he came on the place where the shots had been fired. There were two men — neither of them police — wounded on the grass, and at first he hoped they were two of the bushrangers; but, unluckily they turned out to be two of Barker's stockmen. Two lads, who attended to them, told him that the bushrangers had turned on the party here, and shown fight; that no one had been wounded but these two; that in retreating they had separated, three having gone to the right, and two to the left; that Lieutenant Hillyar had ordered Mr. Barker's men, and three troopers, to go to the right; while he, attended only by Cadet Simpson, had followed the two who had gone to the left, with the expressed intention of riding them down, as they were the best mounted of the five robbers.

"I hope," thought the Secretary, "that he will not make a fool of himself. The fellow is showing pluck and resolution, though — a deal of pluck and resolution. He means to make a spoon or spoil a horn to-day."

So, armed only with a hunting-whip, he put his horse at a canter, and hurried on to overtake Hillyar. Soon after he heard several shots ahead, and began to

think that he might as well have had something better in his hand than a hunting-whip. Then he met a riderless horse, going large and wild, neighing and turning his head from side to side, and carrying, alas! a government saddle. Then he came on poor Simpson, lying by the side of the road, looking very ghastly and wild, evidently severely wounded.

Mr. Oxtan jumped off, and cried, "Give me your carbine, my poor lad. Where's Hillyar?"

"Gone after the other two," said Simpson, feebly.

"Two to one now, eh?" said Mr. Oxtan. "This gets exciting."

So he rode away, with the carbine on his knee; but he never had occasion to use it. Before he had ridden far he came on the body of one of the convicts, lying in a heap by the roadside; and, a very short time afterwards, he met a young gentleman, in an undress light-dragoon uniform, who was riding slowly towards him, leading handcuffed to his saddle, one of the most fiendish-looking ruffians that eye ever beheld.

"Well done, Hillyar! Bravely done, sir!" cried Mr. Oxtan. "I am under personal obligations to you. The colony is under personal obligations to you, sir. You are a fine fellow, sir!"

"Recommend me to these new American revolvers, Mr. Secretary," replied the young man. "These fellows had comparatively no chance at me with their old pistols, though this fellow has unluckily hit poor Simpson. When we came to close quarters I shot one fellow, but this one, preferring hanging (queer taste), surrendered, and here he is."

This Lieutenant Hillyar, of whom we have heard so much and seen so little, was certainly a very hand-

some young fellow. Mr. Oxton was obliged to confess that. He was tall and well-made, and his features were not rendered less attractive by the extreme paleness of his complexion, though one who knew the world as well as the Secretary could see that the deep lines in his face told of desperate hard living; and yet now (whether it was that the Secretary was anxious to make the best of him, or that George Hillyar was anxious to make the best of himself) his appearance was certainly not that of a dissipated person. He looked high-bred and handsome, and lolled on his horse with an air of easy languor, not actually unbecoming in a man who had just done an act of such unequivocal valour.

"Revolvers or not, sir," said Mr. Oxton, "there is no doubt about your courage and determination. I wonder if the other party will have fared as well as you."

"Undoubtedly," said Hillyar; "the other three fellows were utterly out-numbered. I assure you I took great pains about this business. I was determined it should succeed. You see, I have, unfortunately, a rather biting tongue, and have made myself many enemies; and I have been an objectless man hitherto, and perhaps have lived a little too hard. Now, however, that I have something to live for, I shall change all that. I wish the colony to hear a different sort of report about me; and, more than that, I wish to rise in the esteem of the Honourable James Oxton, Chief Secretary for the Colony of Cooksland, and I have begun already."

"You have, sir," said the Secretary, frankly. "Much remains; however, we will talk more of this another

time. See, here lies poor Simpson; let us attend to him. Poor fellow!"

CHAPTER VIII.

James Burton's Story: the Immediate Results of the Expedition to Stanlake.

I HAD a presentiment that our proposed Sunday expedition to Stanlake would lead to something; and I was anxious. I noticed that my mother had cried at the mention of the place. I saw the look that my father and mother interchanged when Reuben came in; and I had overheard my father's confidential growl about the sins of the fathers being visited on the children, and so on. Therefore I felt very much as if I was doing wrong in yielding to Joe's desire to go there, without telling my father. But I simply acquiesced, and never mentioned my scruples (after my first feeble protest in bed) even to Joe. And I will confess why. I had a great curiosity to see the place. I was only a poor stupid blacksmith-lad; but my crippled brother had given me a taste for beautiful things, and, from my father's description, this was the most beautiful place in the world. Then there was the charm of secrecy and romance about this expedition — but why analyse the motives of a boy? To put it shortly, we deceived our good father and mother for the first time when we went there; and we reaped the consequences.

The consequences! But, had the consequences been shown to me in a glass, on that bright Sunday morn when we started to Stanlake, should I have paused? I

have asked myself that question more than once, and I have answered it thus. If I had seen all the consequences which were to follow on that expedition then, I would have thrown myself off Battersea Bridge sooner than have gone. But I was only a blind, ignorant boy at that time. Now, as a man, I begin, dimly and afar off, to understand why we were let go. I don't see it all yet, but I begin to see it.

I think that, if I had been the same man that morning as I am now, I would have said a prayer — and gone.

Now, what seems almost like accident, were there such a thing, favoured us that Sunday morning. An affair which had been growing to a head for some time came to its crisis that morning. Mr. and Mrs. William Avery had taken our first floor, and Bill himself was not going on at all well. Mrs. Bill had a nasty tongue, and he was much too "handy with his hands." So it came about that Bill was more and more at the "Black Lion," and that my father, who had contrived to sawder up every man-and-wife quarrel in the buildings, was fairly puzzled here. This very Saturday evening the crash came. We had heard him and his wife "at it" all the evening; and heavy things, such as chairs, had been falling overhead, whereat my mother had said, "There! Did you ever?" But at eight o'clock, Emma, taking Fred up the broad old stairs to bed, in his nightgown, leading him with one hand, holding a lighted candle in the other, and slowly crooning out "The Babes in the Wood" in her own sweet way, was alarmed by the Averys' door being burst open, and by the awful spectacle of Mr. and Mrs. Avery fighting on the landing. Instantly after, whether on purpose or

by accident I cannot say, the poor woman was thrown headlong down stairs, on to the top of Emma and Fred. The candle behaved like a magnificent French firework; but Mrs. Bill, Emma, and Fred, came down in a heap on the mat, the dear child, with his usual luck, underneath.

After this, William Avery, holding the landing, and audibly, nay, loudly, expressing his desire to see the master blacksmith who would come upstairs and offer to interfere between a man and his wife, it became necessary for Mrs. Avery to be accommodated below for the night. The next morning, after the liquor had died out of him, William Avery was brought to task by my father; and during the imbroglio of recriminations which ensued, which ended in an appeal to the magistrate, we boys dared to do what we had never dared to do before — to escape church, take the steamer to London Bridge, and get on to Croydon by the atmospheric railway, reaching that place at half-past twelve.

It was September, but it was summer still. Those who live in the country, they tell me, can see the difference between a summer-day in September and a summer-day in June; but we town-folks cannot. The country-folks have got tired of their flowers, and have begun to think of early fires, and shortening days, and turnips, and deep cover, and hollies standing brave and green under showering oak-leaves, which fall on the swift wings of flitting woodcocks; but to town-folks September is even as June. The same deep shadows on the grass, the same tossing plumage on the elms, the same dull silver on the willows. More silence in the brooks perhaps, and more stillness in the woods;

but the town-bred eye does not recognise the happy doze before the winter's sleep. The country is the country to them, and September is as June.

On a bright September day, Joe and I came, well directed, to some park-palings, and after a short consultation we — in for a penny in for a pound, demoralized by the domestic differences of Mr. and Mrs. Bill Avery — climbed over them, and stood, trespassing flagrantly in the park which they enclosed. We had no business there. We knew we were doing wrong. We knew that we ought to have gone to church that morning. We were guilty beings for, I really think, the first time in our lives. William Avery's having thrown his wife down stairs on to the top of Emma and Fred had been such a wonderful disturbance of old order and law, that we were in a revolutionary frame of mind. We knew that order would be once more restored, some time or another, but, meanwhile, the barricades were up, and the jails were burning; so we were determined to taste the full pleasure derivable from a violent disturbance of the political balance.

First of all we came on a bright broad stream, in which we could see brown spotted fish, scudding about on the shallows, which Joe said must be trout. And, after an unsuccessful attempt to increase the measure of our sins by adding poaching to trespass, we passed on towards a dark wood, from which the stream issued.

It was a deep dark wood of lofty elms, and, as we passed on into it, the gloom grew deeper. Far aloft the sun gleamed on the highest boughs; but, beneath, the stream swept on through the shadows, with scarcely a gleam of light upon the surface. At last we came on a waterfall, and, on our climbing the high bank on

one side of it, the lake opened on our view. It was about a quarter of a mile long, hemmed in by wood on all sides, with a boathouse, built like a Swiss chalet, halfway along it.

The silence and solitude were profound; nothing seemed moving but the great dragon-flies; it was the most beautiful place we had ever seen; nothing would have stopped us now short of a policeman.

We determined to wait, and go further before we gathered the water-lilies; then, suddenly, up rose a great red-and-black butterfly, and Joe cried out to me for heaven's sake to get it for him. Away went the butterfly, and I after it, headlong, not seeing where I went, only intent on the chase. At one time I clambered over a sunk fence, and found myself out of the wood; then I vaulted over an iron hurdle, then barely saved myself from falling into a basin of crystal water, with a fountain in the middle; then I was on a gravel walk, and at last got my prize under my cap, in the middle of a bed of scarlet geranium and blue lobelia.

"Hang it," I thought, "I must be out of this pretty quick. *This* won't do. We shan't get through this Sunday without a blessed row, I *know*."

A voice behind me said, with every kind of sarcastic emphasis —

"*Upon* my veracity, young gentleman. *Upon* my word and honour. Now do let me beg and pray of you, my dear creature, to make yourself entirely at home. Trample, and crush, and utterly destroy, three or four more of my flower-beds, and then come in and have some lunch. *Upon* my word and honour!"

I turned, and saw behind me a very handsome gentleman, of about fifty-five or so, in a blue coat, a white waistcoat, and drab trousers, exquisitely neat, who stood and looked at me, with his hands spread abroad interrogatively, and his delicate eyebrows arched into an expression of sarcastic inquiry. "He won't hit me," was my first thought; and so I brought my elbows down from above my ears, rolled up my cap with the butterfly inside it, and began to think about flight.

I couldn't take my eyes off him. He was a strange figure to me. So very much like a perfect piece of waxwork. His coat was so blue, his waistcoat so white, his buttons so golden, his face so smoothly shaven, and his close-cropped grey hair so wonderfully sleek. His hands too, such a delicate mixture of brown and white, with one blazing diamond on the right one. I saw a grand gentleman for the first time, and this, combined with a slightly guilty conscience, took the edge off my London 'prentice audacity, and made me just the least bit in the world afraid.

I had refinement enough (thanks to my association with Joe, a gentleman born) not to be impudent. I said — "I am very, very sorry, sir. The truth is, sir, I wanted this butterfly, and I followed it into your grounds. I meant no harm, indeed, sir." (As I *said* it, in those old times, it ran something like this — "I wanted that ere butterfly, sir, and I follered of it into your little place, which I didn't mean no harm, I do assure you.")

"Well! well! well!" said Sir George Hillyar, "I don't say you did. When I was at Eton, I have bee-hunted into all sorts of strange places. To the very feet of royalty, on one occasion. Indeed, you are for-

given. See here, Erne: here is a contrast to your lazy style of life; here is a ——”

“Blacksmith,” I said.

“Blacksmith,” said Sir George, “I beg your pardon; who will — will — do *all kinds of things*” (he said this with steady severity) “in pursuit of a butterfly. An example, my child.”

Taking my eyes from Sir George Hillyar, for the first time, I saw that a boy, about my own age apparently (I was nearly seventeen), had come up and was standing beside him, looking at me, with his arm passed through his father’s, and his head leaning against his shoulder.

Such a glorious lad. As graceful as a deer. Dark brown hair, that wandered about his forehead like the wild boughs of a neglected vine; features regular and beautiful; a complexion well-toned, but glazed over with rich sun-brown; a most beautiful youth, yet whose beauty was extinguished and lost in the blaze of two great blue-black eyes, which forced you to look at them, and which made you smile as you looked.

So I saw him first. How well I remember his first words, “Who is this?”

I answered promptly for myself. I wanted Joe to see him, for we had never seen anything like him before, and Joe was now visible in the dim distance, uncertain what to do. I said, “I hunted this butterfly, sir, from the corner of the lake into this garden; and, if you will come to my brother Joe, he will confirm me. May I go, sir?”

“You may go, my boy,” said Sir George; “and, Erne, you may show him off the place, if you please.

This seems an honest lad, Erne. You may walk with him if you will."

So he turned and went towards the house, which I now had time to look at. A bald, bare, white place, after all; with a great expanse of shadeless flower-garden round it. What you would call a very great place, but a very melancholy one, which looked as though it must be very damp in winter. The lake in the wood was the part of that estate which pleased me best.

Erne and I walked away together, towards the dark inscrutable future, and never said a word till we joined Joe. Then we three walked on through the wood, Joe very much puzzled by what had happened; and at last Erne said to me —

"What is your name?"

"Jim."

"I say, Jim, what did you come here for, old fellow?"

"We came after the water-lilies," I said. "We were told there were yellow ones here."

"So there were," he said; "but we have rooted them all up. If you will come here next Sunday, I will get you some."

"I am afraid we can't, sir," I said. "If it hadn't been for Bill Avery hitting his missis down stairs, we couldn't have come here to-day. And we shall catch it now."

"Do you go to school?" said Erne.

"No, sir; I am apprenticed to father. Joe here does."

"Do the fellows like you, Joe? Have you got any friends?"

Joe stopped, and looked at him. He said:

"Yes, sir. Many dear friends, God be praised! though I am only a poor hunchback. Have you many, sir?"

"Not one single one, God help me, Joe. Not one single one."

It came on to rain, but he would not leave us. We walked to the station together; and, as we walked, Joe, the poet, told us tales, so that the way seemed short. Tales of sudden friendships made in summer gardens, which outlive death. Of long-sought love; of lands far off; lands of peace and wealth, where there was no sorrow, no care; only an eternal, dull, aching regret for home, never satisfied; and of the great heaving ocean, which thundered and burst everlastingly on the pitiless coast, and sent its echoes booming up the long-drawn corridors of the dark storm-shaken forest capes.

Did Joe tell us all these stories, or has my memory become confused? I forget, good reader, I forget; it is so long ago.

We had to wait, and Erne would sit and wait with us in the crowded waiting-room, and he sat between Joe and me. He asked me where I lived, and I told him, "Church Place, Church Street, Chelsea." Somehow we were so crowded that his arm got upon my shoulder, just as if he were a schoolfellow and an equal. The last words he said were —

"Come back and see me, Jim. I have not got a friend in the world."

Joe, in the crush before the train started, heard the station-master say to a friend: "It's a queer thing: it runs in families. There's young Erne Hillyar is

going the same way as his brother. I seen him, with my own eyes, sitting in the second-class waiting-room, with his arm on the shoulder of a common young cad. He has took to low company, you see; and he will go to the devil, like his brother."

If the station-master had known what I thought of him after I heard this, he would not have slept the better, I fancy. Low company, forsooth. Could the Honourable James Burton, of the Legislative Council of Cooksland, Colonial Commissioner for the Exhibition of 1862, ever have been justly described as "low company?" Certainly not. I was very angry then. I am furious now. Intolerable!

This Sunday's expedition, so important as it was, was never inquired into by my father. When we got home we found that our guilty looks were not noticed. The affair between William Avery and his wife had complicated itself, and got to be very serious, and sad indeed. When we got home we found my father sitting and smoking opposite my mother; and, on inquiry, we heard that Emma had been sent up to bed with the children at seven o'clock.

I thought at first that we were going to "catch it." I, who knew every attitude of theirs so well, could see that they were sitting in judgment; and I thought it was on us. This was the first time we had ever done any great wrong to them; and I felt that, if we could have it out, there and then, we should be happier. And so I went to my father's side, put my arm on his shoulder, and said:

"Father, I will tell you all about it."

"My old Jim," he answered, "what can you tell any more than we have heard this miserable day?"

We know all as you may have heard, my boy. Little Polly Martin, too. Who would have thought it?" My mother began to cry bitterly. I began to guess that William Avery had quarrelled with his wife on the grounds of jealousy, and, also, that my father and mother had sifted the evidence and pronounced her guilty. I knew all about it at once from those few words, though I was but a lad of sixteen.

I knew now, and I had suspected before, that young Mrs. Avery was no longer such a one as my father and mother would allow to sit down in the same room with Emma.

She had been, before her marriage, a dark-eyed pretty little body, apparently quite blameless in every way, and a great favourite of my mother's. But she married William Avery, a smart young waterman, rather too much given to "potting," and she learnt the accursed trick of drinking from him. And then everything went wrong. She could sing, worse luck; and one Saturday night she went marketing, and did not come home. And he went after her, and found her singing in front of the Six Bells in the King's Road, having spent all his money. And then he beat her for the first time; and then things went on from bad to worse, till the last and worst crash came, on the very week when Joe and I ran away to Stanlake.

William was fined by Mr. Paynter for beating his wife; and soon after *his* end came. He took seriously to drinking. One dark night he and his mate were bringing the barge down on the tide — his mate, Sam Agar, with the sweeps, and poor Avery steering — and she (the barge) wouldn't behave. Sam knew that poor Avery was drunk, and rectified his bad steering

with the sweeps, as well as he was able. But, approaching Battersea Bridge, good Sam saw that she was broadside to the tide, and cried out: "Starboard, Bill! Starboard, old boy, for God's sake;" but there was no answer. She struck the Middlesex pier of the main arch heavily, and nearly heaved over and went down, but righted and swung through. When Sam Agar found himself in clear water, he ran aft to see after Bill Avery. But the poor fellow had tumbled over long before, and the barge had been steering herself for a mile. His body came ashore opposite Smith's distillery, and Mr. Wakely delivered himself of a philippic against drunkenness to the jury who sat upon him.

And his wife went utterly to the bad. I thought we had heard the last of her, but it was not so. My mother's face, when she turned up again, after so many years, ought to have been photographed and published. "Well, now, you know, this really *is*," was what she *said*. It was the expression of her face, the look of blank staring wonder that amused Joe and me so much.

CHAPTER IX.

Sir George Hillyar.

ONE morning in September, Sir George Hillyar sat in his study, before his *escritoire*, very busy with his papers; and beside him was his lawyer, Mr. Compton.

Sir George was a singularly handsome, middle-aged gentleman, with a square ruddy face, very sleek

close-cropped grey hair, looking very high-bred and amiable, save in two points. He had a short thick neck, like a bull-dog, and a very obstinate-looking and rather large jaw. To give you his character in a few words, he was a just, kind man, of not very high intellect, in spite of his high cultivation; of intensely strong affections, and (whether it was the fault of his thick neck, or his broad jaw, I cannot say), as obstinate as a mule.

"Are you really going to renew this lease, Sir George?" said Mr. Compton.

"Why, yes, I think so. I promised Erne I would."

"Will you excuse me, Sir George, if I ask, as your confidential friend of many years' standing, what the deuce my young friend Erne has to do with the matter?"

"Nothing in the world," said Sir George; "but they got hold of him when we were down there, and he got me to promise. Therefore I must, don't you see."

"No, I don't. This widow and her sons are ruining the farm; you propose to give them seven years longer to complete their work. How often have you laid it down as a rule, never to renew a lease to a widow; and here you are doing it, because that young gaby, Erne, has been practised on, and asks you."

"I know all that," said Sir George, "but I am quite determined."

"Very well, then," said Mr. Compton, rather nettled, "let's say no more. I know what *that* means."

"You see, Compton, I *will* not disappoint that boy in anything of this kind. I have kept him here alone with me, and allowed him to see scarce any one. You

know why. And the boy has not seen enough of the outside world, and has no sympathies with his fellow-men whatever. And I will not baulk him in this. These are the first people he has shown an interest in, Compton, and he shan't be baulked."

"He would have shown an interest in plenty of people, if you would have let him," said the lawyer. "You have kept him mewed up here till he is seventeen, with no companion, but his tutor, and your grey-headed household. The boy has scarcely spoken with a human being under fifty in his lifetime. Why don't you let him see young folks of his own age?"

"Why!" said Sir George angrily. "Have I two hearts to break that you ask me this? You know why, Compton. You know how that woman and her child broke my heart once. Do you want it broken again by this, the child of my old age, I may say — the child of my angel Mary?"

"You will have your heart broken if you don't mind, Hillyar," said the lawyer. "I will speak out once and for all. If you keep that boy tied up here in this unnatural way, he will play the deuce some day or another. Upon my word, Hillyar, this fantigue of yours approaches lunacy. To keep a noble high-mettled boy like Erne cooped up among grey-headed grooms and footmen, and never to allow him to see a round young face except in church. It is rank madness."

"I have had enough of young servants," said Sir George. "I will have no more Samuel Burtons, if you please."

"Who the deuce wants you to? Send the boy among lads in his own rank in life."

"I have done it once. They bore him. He don't like 'em."

"Because you don't let him choose them for himself."

"Let him have the chance of choosing, in his ignorance, such ruffians as young Mottesfont and young Peters, for instance," said Sir George, scornfully. "No more of that, thank you, either. You are a sage counsellor, upon my word, Compton. Let us change the subject."

"Upon my honour we had better," said the lawyer, "if I am to keep my temper. You are, without exception, the most wrong-headed man I ever saw. This I will say, that, as soon as Erne is released from this unnatural restraint, as he must be soon, he will make friends with the first young man, and fall in love with the first pretty face, he sees. You have given him no selection; and, by Jove, you have given him a better chance of going to the deuce than ever you did his half-brother."

Obstinate men are not always ill tempered; Sir George Hillyar was not an ill-tempered man. His obstinacy arose as much perhaps from self-esteem, caused by his having been from his boyhood master of ten thousand a year, as from his bull-neck and broad jaw. He was perfectly good-tempered over this scolding of his kind old friend; he only said —

"Now, Compton, you know me. I have thought over the matter more than you have. I am determined. Let us get on to business."

"*Very* well!" said the lawyer; "these papers you have signed; I had better take them to the office."

"Yes; put 'em in your old japanned box, and put

it on the third shelf from the top, between Viscount Saltire and the Earl of Ascot; not much in *his* box, is there, hey?"

"A deal there shouldn't be," said the lawyer. "Is there *nothing* more for me to put in the tin box of Sir George Hillyar, Bart. on the third shelf from the top?"

"No! hang it, no, Compton. I'll keep it here. I *might* alter it. Things might happen; and, when, death looks in between the curtains, a man is apt to change his mind. I'll keep it here."

"He pointed to the tall fantastically-carved escritoire at which he was sitting, and, tapping it, said once again, "I'll keep it here, Compton; I'll keep it here, old friend."

Sir George Hillyar's history is told in a very few words. His first marriage was a singularly unfortunate one. Lady Hillyar sold herself to him for his wealth, and afterwards revenged herself on him by leading him the life of a dog. She was an evil-tempered woman, and her ill-temper improved by practice. They had one son, the Lieutenant Hillyar we have already seen in Australia, and whose history we have heard; whose only recollections of a mother must have been those of a restless dark woman who wrangled and wept perpetually. Sir George Hillyar's constitutional obstinacy did him but little good here; his calm inflexibility was more maddening to his fierce wild wife than the loudest objurgation would have been. One night, when little George was lying in his cradle, she kissed him and left the house; left it for utter ruin and disgrace; unfaithful more from temper than from passion.

In two years she died. She wore her fierce heart

out at last in ceaseless reproaches on the man with whom she had fled, the man whom she had jilted that she might marry Sir George Hillyar. A dark wild story all through; which left its traces on the obstinate face of Sir George Hillyar, and on the character and life of his poor boy.

Dark suspicions arose in his mind about this boy. He never loved him, but he was inexorably just to him. His suspicions about him were utterly groundless; his common sense told him that, but he could not love him, for he had nearly learnt to hate his mother. He was more than ordinarily careful over his education, and his extra care led to the disasters we know of.

But there was a brief glimpse of sunshine in store for Sir George Hillyar. He was still a young, and, in spite of all appearances, a warm-hearted man. And he fell in love again.

He went down into Wiltshire to shoot over an outlying estate of his, which he seldom visited save for sporting purposes, keeping no establishment there, but lodging with his bailiff. And it so happened that the gamekeeper's daughter came down the long grass ride, between the fallowing hazel copse, under the October sun, to bring them lunch. And she was so divinely beautiful that he shot badly all the afternoon, and in the evening went to the keeper's lodge to ask questions about the pheasants, and saw her again. And she was so graceful, so good, and so modest, that in four days he asked her to marry him; and, if ever there was a happy marriage it was this; for truth is stranger than fiction, as many folks know.

They had one boy, whom they christened Erne, after an Irish family; and, when he was two years old,

poor Lady Hillyar stayed out too late one evening on the lake, too soon after her second confinement. She caught cold, and died, leaving an infant who quickly followed her. And then Sir George transferred all the love of his heart to the boy Erne, who, as he grew, showed that he had inherited not only his mother's beauty, but all the yielding gentleness of her disposition.

CHAPTER X.

Erne makes his Escape from the Brazen Tower.

AFTER his wife's death, Sir George Hillyar transferred all the love of his heart from the dead mother to the living child. He was just to his eldest son; but George Hillyar could not but see that he was as naught compared to his younger half-brother — nay more, could not but see that there was something more than mere indifference in his father's feelings towards him; there was dislike. Carefully as Sir George concealed it, as he thought, the child discovered it, and the boy resented it. And so it fell out that George Hillyar never knew what it was to be loved until he met Gertrude Neville. By his father's mistaken policy, with regard to his education, he was thrown among vicious people, and became terribly vicious himself. He went utterly to the dogs. He grew quite abandoned at one time; and was within reach of the law. But, perhaps, the only wise thing his father ever did for him, was to stop his rambles on the Continent, and, partly by persuasion, partly by threats, induce him to go to Australia. He got a cadetship in the police, partly for the pay, partly for

the uniform, partly for the sake of the *entrée* — the recognised position it would give him in certain quarters. So he raised himself somewhat. He found, at first, that it *paid* to be respectable. Then he found that it was pleasant to be in society; and his old life appeared, at times, to be horrible to him. And, at last, he fell in love with Gerty Neville; and, what is stranger still, she fell in love with him. At this time there is a chance for him. As we leave him with good Mr. Oxton, looking after his wounded comrade, his fate hangs in the balance.

After this terrible *fiasco*, Sir George would have no more of schools or young servants. He had been careful enough with his firstborn (as he thought then); he would lock Erne up in a brazen tower. He filled his house with grey-headed servants; he got for the boy, at a vast expense, a gentle, kind old college don as tutor — a man who had never taken orders, with a taste for natural history, who wished to live peaceably, and mix with good society. The boy Erne was splendidly educated and cared for. He was made a little prince, but they never spoiled him. He must have friends of his own age, of course; Lord Edward Bellamy and the little Marquis of Tullygoram were selected, and induced to come and stay with him, after close inquiries, and some dexterous manœuvring on the part of Sir George. But Erne did not take to them. They were nice, clever lads, but neither of them had been to school, Erne objected. He wanted to know fellows who had been to school; nay, rebelliously wanted to go to school himself — which was not to be thought of. In short, at seventeen, Erne was a very noble, sensitive, well-educated and clever lad, without a single

friend of his own age; and, becoming rebellious, he began to cast about to find friends for himself. It was through Providence, and not Sir George's good management, that he did not do worse in that way, than he did, poor lad.

Sir George Hillyar and Mr. Compton met in the dining-room at the second gong. Sir George rang the bell and asked if Mr. Erne was come in. He was not.

"We will have dinner, though. If the boy likes his soup cold, let him have it so." And so they went to dinner.

But no Erne. Claret and abuse of Lord John; then coffee and abuse of Sir Robert; but no Erne. They began to get uneasy.

"He has never gone out like this before," said Sir George. "I must really make inquiries."

But no one could answer them. Erne was not in his bed-room. His horse was in the stable. Even Mr. Compton got anxious.

Obstinate men are pretty sure to adopt the counsels they have scornfully declined, as soon as they can do so without being observed. Old Compton knew obstinate men well; and knew, therefore, that what he had said about Erne's being kept in solitude, would, after a decent lapse of time, lead to Erne's being treated in a more rational way. He knew well that no people are more easily managed than obstinate people, (by those whom they thoroughly respect), if a sharp attack is made on them, and then silence preserved on the subject ever after. He knew that the slightest renewal of the subject would postpone the adoption of his advice indefinitely, for he knew that obstinacy

was only generated by conceit and want of determination. Therefore he was very anxious.

"Erne has bolted," he thought, "and ruined all. There is no chance of knocking sense into his father's head this next ten years."

But Sir George walked uneasily up and down, thinking of far other things. His terror took a material form. Something must have happened to Erne. He had gone out alone, and something had befallen him; what, he could not conceive, but he vowed that, if he ever got him back again, he should choose what companion he would, but should never go out alone any more. By daylight he was half crazy with anxiety, and just afterwards frantic. The head keeper came in, and reported that one of the boats was loose on the lake.

They dragged it madly, from end to end. The country people heard that young Erne Hillyar was drowned in Stanlake pool, and were kind enough to come in by hundreds. It was the best thing since the fair. The gypsies moved up in a body, and told fortunes. The country folks came and sat in rows on the wire fences, like woodpigeons on ash trees in autumn. The young men and boys "chivied" one another through the flower-garden, turned on the fountains, and pushed one another into the marble basins; and the draggers dragged in the lake, and produced nothing but water-lily roots; which, being mistaken for rare esculents by the half-cockney population, were stolen by the thousand, and, after abortive attempts to eat them, were (politically speaking) thrown in the teeth of Sir George Hillyar, at the next election, by a radical cobbler who compared him to Foulon.

At five o'clock, the body not having been found, Sir George Hillyar, having pre-determined that his son was drowned, gave orders for the cutting of the big dam, not without slight misgivings that he was making a fool of himself. Then the fun grew fast and furious. This was better than the fair by a great deal. They brought up beer in large stone bottles from the public-house, and enjoyed themselves thoroughly. By a quarter to six the lake was nearly dry, and nearly everybody was drunk. At this time the first fish was caught; a young man ducked into the mud, and brought out a ten-pound carp by his gills, exclaiming, "Here's the body, Bill!" which expression passed into the joke of the evening. Every time a fresh carp, tench, or pike, was thrown out kicking into the gravel, the young men would roar out, "Here's the body, Bill," once more. At last the whole affair approached very nearly to a riot. Women, who had come after their husbands, were heard here and there scolding or shrieking. There were two or three fights. There had been more beer ordered than was paid for. A policeman had been pushed into the mud. But no body.

The butler, coming into the library at ten o'clock to see the windows shut against the loose characters who were hanging about, discovered the body of Erne Hillyar, Esquire, in an easy chair, reading *Blackwood's Magazine* by a bedroom candlestick. And the body said, "I say, Simpson, what the deuce is all that row about down by the lake?"

"They have cut the dam, and let off the water to find your body, sir," replied Simpson, who prided himself on not being taken by surprise.

"What fools," said Erne. "Is the Governor in a great *war*?"

"I fancy not sir, *at present*," replied Simpson.

"Tell him I wish to speak to him, will you," said Erne, turning over a page. "Say I should be glad of a word with him, if he will be good enough to step this way." And so he went on unconcernedly reading; and Simpson, who had a profound belief in Erne, went to Sir George, and delivered the message exactly as Erne had given it.

Sir George came raging into the room in a very few minutes. Erne half-closed his book, keeping his finger in the place, and, quietly looking up at his father, said,

"I am afraid you expected me home last night, my dear father."

Sir George was too much astounded by Erne's coolness, to do more than gasp.

"I hope I have not caused you any anxiety. But the fact is this; I went into town by the five o'clock train, to see the Parkers at Brompton; and they offered me a bed (it being late), which I accepted. I went for a ramble this morning, which ended in my walking all the way home here; and that is what makes me so late."

"You seem to have a good notion of disposing of your own time, without notice, sir," said Sir George, who had been so astounded by his reception, that he had not yet had time to lay his hand upon his wrath bottle.

"Yes, I like having an impromptu ramble of this kind. It is quite a new experience do you know, dad," said Erne, speaking with a little more animation, and

laying aside his book for the first time. "I would have given a hundred pounds for you to have been with me to day. New scenes and new people all the way home. As new to me — nay, newer and fresher — than the Sandwich Islands would be. I wish you had been there."

"Doesn't it strike you, sir, that you are taking this matter somewhat coolly?" said Sir George, aghast.

"No! am I?" said Erne. "That is a compliment, coming from you, dad. How often have you told me, that you hated a man without self-possession. See how I have profited by your teaching."

"Hold your tongue, sir," said Sir George, finding his wrath bottle, and drawing the cork. "Are you aware, sir, that the dam has been cut to find your body? Are you aware of that, sir? Do you know, sir, that the populace have, in the excitement consequent on your supposed death, overrun my pleasure-grounds, trampled on my flower-beds, broken my statues, and made faces at my lawyer through my drawing-room window?"

If ever you try a torrent of invective, for heaven's sake steer clear of details, lest in the heat of your speech you come suddenly across a ridiculous or homely image, and, rhetorically speaking, ruin yourself at once, as did Sir George Hillyar on this occasion. As he thundered out this last terrible consequence of Erne's absence, Erne burst out laughing, and Sir George, intensely delighted at getting him back again on any terms, and also dying for a reconciliation, burst out laughing too, and held out his arms. After which the conversation took another tone; as thus —

"Why did you go away, and never give me notice, my boy?"

"I won't do it again. I will tell you next time." And all that sort of thing.

* * * * *

"What on earth has come over the boy?" said Sir George Hillyar to himself as soon as he was in bed, lying on his back, with his knees up, which is the best attitude for thinking in bed. "He will make a debater, that boy, sir, mark my words. I tell you, sir," continued he, angrily, and somewhat rudely contradicting himself, "that you have been a fool about that boy. The cool way in which he turned on you to-day, sir, and, partly by calculating on your affection for him, and partly by native tact and self-possession, silenced you, sir — got his own way, established a precedent for going out when he chose, and left you strongly disinclined to risk another battle — was, I say, sir, masterly."

After a time, having sufficiently contradicted and bullied himself, he turned over on his side, and said, as he was falling to sleep —

"The boy is wonderfully changed in one day. He shall go again if he chooses. I never saw such a change in my life. He never showed fight like this before. What can be the matter with him?"

The old complaint, Sir George. The boy has fallen in love. Nothing else.

CHAPTER XI.

The Secretary sees nothing for it but to Submit.

THE talk of the colony, for a week or so, turned upon nothing else but the gallant exploit of Lieutenant Hillyar with the bushrangers. He became the hero of the day. His orderly persuaded him to have his hair cut; and the locks went off like smoke at half-a-crown apiece; so fast, indeed, that the supply fell short of the demand, and had to be supplied from the head of a young Danish trooper, who, after this happening to get drunk in Palmerston, while in plain clothes, and not being recognised, was found to be so closely cropped, that it was necessary to remand him for inquiries, as it was obvious to the meanest capacity that he hadn't been out of jail more than a couple of days.

The papers had leading articles upon it. The *Palmerston Sentinel* (Squatter* interest, conservative, aristocratic), said that this was your old English blood, and that there was nothing like it. The *Mohawk* (progress of the species and small farm interest) said, on the other hand, that this Lieutenant Hillyar was one of those men who had been unjustly hunted out of his native land, by the jealousy of an accursed and corrupt aristocracy, in consequence of his liberal tendencies, and his fellow-feeling for the (so-called) lower orders.

* The "squatters" of Australia are the great pastoral aristocrats, who lease immense tracts from government for pasturage. Some of them are immensely wealthy. I speak from recollection, when I say that one of Dr. Kerr's stations, on the Darling downs, when sold in 1854, contained 102,000 sheep, whose value at that time was about 25s. apiece. An improvement on Saville Row, decidedly.

And this abominable *Mohawk*, evidently possessed of special knowledge, in trying to prove the habitual condescension of George Hillyar towards his inferiors, did so rake up all his old blackguardisms that Mr. Secretary Oxton was as near mad as need be.

It is hardly necessary to say that, when poor little Gerty Neville heard the news, George Hillyar was, to her, transformed from a persecuted, ill-used, misunderstood man, into a triumphant hero. She threw herself sobbing into her sister's arms, and said —

"Now, Aggy! Now, who was right? Was not I wiser than you, my sister? My noble hero! Two to one, Agnes, and he is so calm and modest about it. Why, James and you were blind. Did not *I* see what he was; am *I* a fool?"

Mrs. Oxton was very much inclined to think she was. She was puzzled with this undoubted act of valour on George Hillyar's part. She had very good sense of her own, and the most profound belief in one of the cleverest men in the world — her husband. Her husband's distrust of the man had reacted on her; so, in the midst of Gerty's wild enthusiasm, she could only hope that things would go right, though she tried to be enthusiastic for Gerty's sake.

Things were very near going right just now. The Secretary and his wife knew too little of their man. The man's antecedents were terribly bad, but the man had fallen in love, and become a hero within a very few months. The Secretary knew men well enough, and knew how seldom they reformed after they had gone as far as (he feared) Lieutenant Hillyar had gone. Both Mr. and Mrs. Oxton were inclined to distrust and oppose him still, in spite of his act of heroism.

But the man himself meant well. There was just enough goodness and manhood left in him to fall in love with Gerty Neville: and a kind of reckless, careless pluck which had been a characteristic of him in his boyhood, had still remained to him. It had been latent, exhibiting itself only in causeless quarrels and headlong gaming, until it had been turned into a proper channel by his new passion, the only serious one of his life. The one cause combined with the other; golden opportunity came in his way: and suddenly he, who had been a distrusted and despised man all his life, found himself a hero, beloved by the beauty of the community, with every cloud cleared away from the future; a man whose name was mentioned by every mouth with enthusiastic praise. It was a glimpse of heaven. His eye grew brighter, his bearing more majestic, his heart softer towards his fellow-creatures. He was happy for the first time in his life. As the poor godless fellow put it to himself, his luck had turned at last.

But we must go a little way back in our story. While he and Mr. Oxton were still trying to make the wounded cadet comfortable, assistance arrived, and it was announced that the other bushrangers were captured. (The cadet recovered, my dear madam, and is now the worthy and highly respected chief commissioner of police for Cooksland.) So the Secretary and the lieutenant rode away together.

"I'll tell you what I would do, Hillyar," said the Secretary; "I should ride down to Palmerston as quick as I could, and report this matter at head quarters; you will probably get your inspectorship — I shall certainly see that you do. And I tell you what, I

shall go with you myself. I must talk over this with the Governor at once. We can get on to my house to-night, and I shall be pleased to see you as my guest."

"That is very kind of you," said Hillyar.

"I cannot conceal from you," said the Secretary, with emphasis, "that I am aware of your having proposed yourself for my brother-in-law."

"I supposed you would know it by this time. I have laid my fortune and my title at Miss Neville's feet, and have been accepted."

"Oh Lord!" said the Secretary, as if he had a sudden twinge of toothache, "I know all about it. It is not your fortune nor your title I want to talk about. What sort of a name can you give her? Can you give her an unsullied name? I ask you as a man of the world, can you do that?"

"As a man of the world, hey?" said the lieutenant; "then, as a man of the world, I should say that Miss Gertrude Neville had made a far better catch than any of her sisters; even a better catch, saving your presence, than her sister Agnes. Such is the idiotic state of English society, that a baronet of old creation with ten thousand a year, and a handsome lady-like wife, will be more *répandu* in London than a mere colonial official, whose rank is so little known in that benighted city, that on his last visit, the mayor of Palmerston was sent down to dinner before him at Lady Noahsark's. If you choose to put it as a man of the world, there you are."

"The fellow don't want for wit," thought the Secretary. "I have got the dor this time." But he answered promptly —

"That is all very fine, Hillyar; but you are under a cloud, you know."

"I must request you, once and for ever, sir, not to repeat that assertion. I am under no cloud. I was fast and reckless in England, and I have been fast and reckless here. I shall be so no longer. I have neglected my police duties somewhat, though not so far as to receive anything more than an admonition. What man, finding himself an heir-expectant to a baronetcy and a fortune, would not neglect this miserable drudgery. What young fellow, receiving an allowance of three hundred a year, would have submitted to the drudgery of a cadetship for fourteen months? Answer me that, sir!"

The Secretary couldn't answer that, but he thought — "I wonder why he did it? I never thought of that before." He said aloud, "Your case certainly looks better than it did, Hillyar."

"Now hear me out," said George Hillyar. "My history is soon told. When I was seven years old my mother — Well, sir, look the other way — she *bolted*."

"Oh, dear, dear me," said the Secretary. "Oh, pray don't go on, sir. I am so very sorry, Hillyar."

"Bolted, sir," repeated George with an angry snarl, "and left me to be hated worse than poison by my father in consequence. How do you like that?"

"There was a mist in the good Secretary's eyes; and in that mist he saw the dear, happy old manor-house in Worcestershire; a dark, mysterious, solemn house, beneath the shadowing elms; the abode of gentle, graceful, domestic love for centuries. And he saw a

bent figure with a widow's cap upon her grey hair, which wandered still among the old flower-beds, and thought for many an hour in the autumn day, whether her brave son would return from his honour and wealth, in far off Australia, and give her one sweet kiss, before she lay down to sleep beside his father, in the quiet churchyard in the park.

"No more, sir!" said the Secretary. "Not another word. I ask your pardon. Be silent."

George would not.

"That is my history. The reason I stayed in the police at all, was that I might stand well with my father; that he might not think I had gone so utterly to the devil as he wished: for he married again — married a milkmaid, or worse — to spite me. And the son he had by her is, according to all accounts, idolized, while I am left here to fight my way alone. I hate that boy, and I will make him feel it."

His case would have stood better without this last outbreak of temper, which jarred sharply on the Secretary's sentimental mood. But he had made his case good. The fight was over. That night he was received at the Secretary's station as an accepted suitor. The next he dined at Government House, and sat all the evening in a corner with Lady Bostock (the Governor's wife), and talked of great people in England, about whom he knew just enough to give her Ladyship an excuse for talking about them, which she liked better than anything in the world, after gardening and driving. So nothing could be more charming; and the Secretary, seeing that it was no use to struggle, gave it up, and determined to offer no opposition to the

marriage of his sister-in-law to a man who would be a wealthy baronet in England.

And this is what made him so excessively mad about those abominable, indiscreet leaders in the *Mohawk*, in praise of the gallant lieutenant. He had used strong language about the *Mohawk* continually, ever since the first number appeared, in the early days of the colony, printed on whitey-brown sugar-paper, with a gross libel upon himself in the first six lines of its leader. But it was nothing to the language he used now. Mr. O'Callagan, the editor of the *Mohawk*, claimant to the Irish peerage of Mount Vinegar, dormant since '98, (and who was christened in consequence Edward Fitzgerald Wolfe Tone Emmet Bond,) found out that he was annoying the Secretary, and continued his allusions in a more offensive form. Until, so says report, Miss Lesbia Burke let him know that, if he continued to annoy James Oxton, she would horsewhip him. Whereupon the *Mohawk* was dumb.

CHAPTER XII.

Disposes of Samuel Burton for a Time.

THE evening after the fight with the bushrangers, the affair was getting noisily discussed in the principal men's hut at the Barker's. The large room, earth-floored, with walls and roof of wood, coloured by the smoke to a deep mahogany, was lit up by the mighty blaze of a wood fire in the great chimney at one end, for the south wind had come up and the night was chilly. Five or six men were seated on logs and stools

round the chimney, eating their supper, and one, who had finished his, had got into bed, and was comfortably smoking and joining in the conversation. They were an honest, good-looking set of fellows enough, for in Cooksland and South Australia, the convict element is very small; and the appearance of rude plenty and honest comfort which was over the whole scene, was pleasant enough to witness by a belated and wearied traveller.

Such a one came to the door that evening, and brought his evil face among them. It was the convict that the Secretary had passed on the sands; it was Samuel Burton.

The cattle and sheep dogs, which lay about in the yard, bayed him furiously, but he passed through them unheeding, and, opening the door, stood in the entry, saying:

"Can I stay here to-night, mates?"

"Surely," said the old hut-keeper, shading his face with his hand. "You must be a stranger to Barker's, to ask such a question. Come in, lad."

The young man who was sitting in the best place by the fire, got up to give it to him. Each one of the men murmured a welcome to him as he came towards the fire; and then, as the fire-light fell upon his face, they saw that he was a convict.

Now and then you will find a jail-bird who will, in appearance, pass muster among honest men; but in this case the word "Old hand" was too plainly written on the face to be mistaken. They insensibly altered their demeanour towards him at once. To their kind hospitality, which had been offered to him before they saw what he was, was now added respectful deference,

and a scarcely concealed desire to propitiate. Seven honest good fellows, were respectfully afraid of one rogue; and the rogue was perfectly aware of the fact, and treated them accordingly; much as a hawk would treat a cote-full of pigeons, if he found it convenient to pass the night among them. The penniless, tattered felon was a sort of lord among them.

Attribute it to what you will, it is so. A better set of fellows than the honest emigrants, generally, don't exist; but their superstitious respect for an old convict is almost pitiable. I fancy, if the Devil were to take it into his head to make thirteenth at a dinner-party, that we should be studiously polite to him, till we had got rid of him; and be careful not to wound his feelings by any allusion to the past.

They put food and tea before him, and he ate and drank voraciously. The hut-keeper did not wait to ask him if he had tobacco: to extort from him what is the last, most humiliating confession of destitution in the bush; but, seeing him look round, put a fig and a pipe in his hand. After he had lit it, he began to talk for the first time.

"I suppose," he said, "none of you chaps know the names of the fellows who got bailed up by young Hillyar this morning?"

The hut-keeper answered, — a quiet, gentle old man, whom the others called Daddy —

"I knew two on 'em. There was Mike Tiernay. He was assigned to Carstairs on the North Esk on time, I mind."

"Hallo!" said Burton. "Are *you*, Stringy Bark?"

"I am from Van Diemen's Land," said the old man, quietly. "But an emigrant."

The convict gave a grunt of disappointment.
"The other one I knew," continued the old man, "was Wallaby Thompson."

It is curious that the old man had, before the arrival of Burton, been entertaining the young men with the lives and crimes of these abominable blackguards. Now, before the representative of their class, he spoke as though it were a liberty to mention the gentlemen's names.

"Wallaby Thompson, eh?" said the convict. "He was an honest, good fellow, and I am sorry for him. I never knew that fellow do a bad action in my life. He was as true as steel. Old Carboys sent his mate for trial, and old Carboys was found in the bush with his throat cut. That's what *I* call a man."

Burton was showing off before these emigrants for purposes of his own. Cutting throats was not his special temptation; and he, probably, never saw Wallaby Thompson, Esq. in his life; in fact, his claiming acquaintance with that gentleman was strong evidence that he knew nothing about him; he being a mere liar and rogue, not dangerous unless desperate. But he took these simple emigrants in by a clever imitation of a bushranger's ferocity, and they believed in him.

"Is young Hillyar at the station here, or at the barracks, to-night?" he asked.

"The Lieutenant is gone down to Palmerston, this morning, with the Secretary," was the answer.

Burton was evidently staggered by this intelligence. He kept his countenance, however, and asked, as coolly as he could, when he was expected back.

"Back?" said the old man; "Lord love you, he'll

never come back *here* no more. At any rate, he'll be made inspector for this job; and so you won't see him *here* again."

"How far is it to Palmerston?" asked Burton.

"One hundred and fifty miles."

He said nothing in answer to this. He sat and thought as he smoked. One hundred and fifty miles! He penniless and shoeless, not in the best of health, having the dread of a return of dysentery! It could not be done — it could not be done. He *must* take service, and then it could not be done for six months; he could not sign for less time than that. He could have cursed his ill luck, but he was not given to cursing on occasions where thought was required. He made his determination at once, and acted on it — in spite of that curious pinched-up lower jaw of his — with quite as much decision as would his old master and enemy, Sir George Hillyar, with his broad bull-dog jowl.

"Are there any of — my sort — here about?" he asked, with an affectedly surly growl.

There is no euphemism invented yet for the word "convict," which is available among the labouring class of Australia, when a convict is present. Those who think they know something of them, might fancy that "old hand," "Vandemonian," or even "Sydney Sider," were not particularly offensive. Those who know them better know that the use of either three expressions, in the presence of one of these sensitive gentlemen, means instant assault and battery. None of the hands in the hut would have ventured on anything of the kind for worlds, but now Burton had put it in his own form, and must be answered.

It appeared that there was a hoary old miscreant

of a shepherd, who was, if the expression might be allowed, "Stringy Bark," and who had quarrelled with his hut-keeper. Burton said he would see about it, and did so, the next day. Barker père, a fine old fellow, was of opinion that, if you were unfortunate enough to have one convict on the place, it was better that you should catch another to bear him company. He therefore was not sorry to avail himself of Samuel Burton's services, in the capacity of hut-keeper to the old convict shepherd he had on the run already.

"Confound 'em," said old Barker; "shut 'em up together, and let 'em corrupt one another. I am glad this scoundrel has come to ask for work. I should have had to send old Tom about his business if he hadn't, and old Tom is the best shepherd I've got; but I never could have asked an honest man to cook for old Tom. No. The appearance of this fellow is a special providence. I should have had to send old Tom to the right-about."

So Samuel Burton, by reason of the badness of his shoes, and a general seediness of character, had to take service with Mr. Barker. He had met with a disappointment in not meeting with George Hillyar, but on the whole he was not sorry to get a chance of lying by for a little. The fact was that he had, six weeks before this, lost his character, and travelling was not safe for a time. He had been transported and reconvicted in the colony, but his character had been good until, as I say, six weeks before this, when he turned Queen's evidence on the great bank-forgery case. That act not only ruined his character (among the convicts I mean, of course), but rendered travelling in lonely places, for a time, before men had had time

to forget, a dangerous business. Therefore he accepted Mr. Barker's service with alacrity, and so George Hillyar heard nothing of him for six peaceful months.

CHAPTER XIII.

James Burton's Story: the Golden Thread begins to Run off the Reel.

COULD one ever have been happy in such a squalid unromantic place? Among such sounds, such smells, such absence of fresh air and sunshine, with poverty and vulgarity in its grossest forms on every side of one — shrill Doll Tearsheet, distinctly and painfully audible round the corner, telling the Nuthook that he had lied, and that sort of thing, all day long; and Pistol, the cutpurse, ruffling and bullying it under the gas-lamp by the corner, from cockshoot to curfew; at which latter time we used to be rid of him for an hour or so? Could any one have had a happy home amidst all this squalor and blackguardism? And could any one, having gained wealth and honour, ever feel a longing kindness for the old, for the cramped horizon, and the close atmosphere, of the place one once called home?

Yes. I often feel it now. The other day the summer wind was still, and the summer clouds slept far aloft, above the highest boughs of the silent forest; and peace and silence were over everything as I rode slowly on among the clustering flowers. And then and there the old Chelsea life came back into my soul and pervaded it completely, and the past drove out the present so utterly and entirely that, although my mortal

body — which, when no longer useful, must perish and rot, like one of the fallen logs around me — was passing through the glorious Australian forest, yet the immortal part of me had travelled back into the squalid old street, and *I* was there once again.

Dear old place! I can love it still. I were but an ingrate if I could not love it better than all other places. After we had been out here ten years, Joe went back on business, and went to see it. A certain change, which we shall hear of, had taken place; the old neighbours were gone, and Chelsea so far as we cared about it, was desolate. But, as Joe lent lonely against the railings in the New Paulton Square, he heard a cry coming from towards the river, which thrilled to his heart as he came nearer and nearer. What was it, think you. It was old Alsop, the fishmonger, bawling out, as of old, the audacious falsehood that his soles were alive. It was nothing more than that, but it was the last of the old familiar Chelsea sounds which was left. When Joe told us this story we were all (simple souls) very much moved. My father said, huskily, that "there were worse chaps than Bill Alsop, mind you, though he did not uphold him in all things," which I was glad to hear. As for my mother, she dissolved into such a flood of tears that the recently-invented pocket-handkerchief was abandoned as useless, and the old familiar apron was adopted instead. Such is the force of habit, that my mother cannot cry comfortably without an apron. The day I was married, Emma had a deal of trouble with her on this account. It was evident that she wanted to wipe her eyes on her horribly expensive mauve satin gown, and at last compromised the matter by crying into her black lace

shawl, which was of about as much use as a fishing net, God bless her.

I have, as I have said, an affection for the old place still; and, when I think of it at its brightest, when I love it best of all, it comes back to me on a fine September evening, on the evening after Joe and I met with our wonderful adventures at Stanlake.

I think I have mentioned before that my father used to relieve me in the shop when he had done his tea; and so I used to have my tea after all the others had done — at which times my sister and I used to have a pleasant talk, while she waited on me.

Latterly I had always had a companion. It was an unfortunate business, but my brother Harry had acquired a sort of habit of getting kept in at school, nearly every day. My mother contrived a meeting with the schoolmaster, and asked him why. The answer was, that he was a good little fellow, but that he *would* draw on his slate. The evening next after she had gained this intelligence, we, all sitting round the fire and expecting to hear the story of how my father came home tipsy the night the Reform Bill was passed, were astonished to find that my mother had composed, and was prepared with, an entirely new story, in the awful-example style of fiction, which she there and then told us. It appeared that she knew a little girl (mark how she wrapped it up) as drew on her slate, and was took with the chalkstone gout in the jints of her fingers. And, while that child was a droring, the chalkstones kep' dropping from her knuckles, and the children kep' picking on'em up and drawing devils on the desks. Harry was at the time both alarmed and distressed at this story. But it had

no effect. The next day he drew a devil so offensive that he was not only kept in, but caned.

So Harry being late from school, was my companion at tea, and sat beside me. Frank, who adored Harry, because Harry used to morphise Frank's dreams for him on slates and bits of paper, stayed with him. Fred, the big-headed, who was brought into the world apparently to tumble down stairs, and to love and cuddle everybody he met, sat on my knee and pulled my hair in a contemplative way; while Emma sat beside me sewing, and softly murmured out the news of the day, carefully avoiding any mention of the Avery catastrophe.

Mr. Pistol and Mr. Bardolph had been took by the police for a robbery in the Fulham Road, and Mrs. Quickly was ready to swear, on her Bible oath, that they were both in bed and asleep at the time. Polly Agar had been kep' in at school for pinching Sally Holmes. Tom Cole was going to row for Dogget's coat and badge. &c. &c.

Frank told us, that, the evening before last, he had walked on to Battersea Bridge with Jerry Chittle, and to the westward he had seen in the sky, just at sunset, an army of giants, dressed in purple and gold, pursuing another army of giants dressed in grey, who, as the sun went down, seemed to turn on their pursuers. He said that the thunderstorm which happened that night was no thunderstorm at all, but the battle of these two armies of giants over our heads. He requested Harry to draw this scene for him on his slate, which Harry found a difficulty in doing.

I was thinking whether or no I could think of anything to say concerning this giant story, and was coming

to the conclusion that I couldn't, when I looked up and saw Erne Hillyar and Joe in the doorway.

I saw Erne's noble face light up as he saw me, "Here he is" was all he said; but, from the way he said it, I knew that he had come after *me*.

I stood up, I remember, and touched my forehead, but he came quickly towards me and took my hand. "I want to be friends with you, Jim," he said; "I know you and I shall suit one another. Let me come and see you sometimes."

I did not know what to say, at least not in words; but, as he took my hand, my eyes must have bid him welcome, for he laughed and said, "That is right. I knew you would like me, I saw it yesterday."

And then he turned on Emma, who was standing, respectful and still, beside me, with her hands closed before her, holding her work. And their eyes met; and Erne loved her, and has never loved any other woman since.

"This must be your sister," said Erne. "There is no doubt about that. Jim's sister, will you shake hands with me?"

She shook hands with him, and smiled her gentlest, kindest smile in his face.

"I am so glad," she said, "that you want to make friends with Jim. You cannot have a better friend than he, sir."

Here Joe came back, and whispered to me that he had been to father, and told him that a young gentleman had come to see me, and that father had said I was to stay where I was. So there we children sat altogether; Erne on one side of me, and Emma on the other, talking about such things as children (for we

were but little more) will talk about — Erne sometimes leaning over me to speak to Emma, and waiting eagerly for an answer Fred got on his knee, and twined his little fingers into his curling hair, and laid his big head upon Erne's shoulder. Frank and Harry drew their stools to his feet, and listened. We were a happy group. Since the wild, petulant earl had built that great house, nigh three hundred years before, and had paced, and fumed, and fretted up and down that self-same floor, there never had been gathered, I dare swear, a happier group of children under the time-stained rafters of that room, than were we that night in the deepening twilight.

Joe and Erne talked most. Joe spoke of the wonderful old church hard by, a city of the mighty dead, and their monuments, where there were innumerable dark, dim recesses, crowded by tombs and effigies. Here lay the headless trunk of Sir Thomas More — not under the noble monument erected by himself in the chancel before his death, but “neare the middle of the south wall,” — indebted to a stranger for a simple slab over his remains. In this chapel, too, knelt the Duchess of Northumberland, with her five daughters, all with clasped hands, praying for the soul of their unhappy father. One of them, Joe could not tell which, must have married Arthur Pole. Here lay Lord and Lady Dacre, with their dogs watching at their feet, under their many-coloured canopy; and last, not least, here knelt John Hillyar, Esq., father of the first baronet, with his three simple-looking sons in ruffs, opposite his wife Eleanor, with her six daughters, and her two dead babies on the cushion before her.

"Four hundred years of memory," continued Joe, "are crowded into that dark old church, and the great flood of change beats round the walls, and shakes the door in vain, but never enters. The dead stand thick together there, as if to make a brave resistance to the moving world outside, which jars upon their slumber. It is a church of the dead. I cannot fancy any one being married in that church — its air would chill the boldest bride that ever walked to the altar. No; it is a place for old people to creep into, and pray, until their prayer is answered, and they sleep with the rest."

"*Hallo!*" I said to myself, "*Hal-lo!* this is the same young gentleman who said of Jerry Chittle yesterday, 'That it worn't no business of his'n,' and would probably do so again to-morrow if necessary." Both Emma and I had noticed lately that Joe had two distinct ways of speaking; this last was the best example of his later style that we had yet heard. The young eagle was beginning to try his wings.

Then Erne began to talk. "Did you know, Jim and Joe, that this Church Place belonged to us before the Sloane Stanleys bought it?"

Joe had been told so by Mr. Faulkner.

"It seems so very strange to find you living *here*, Jim. So very strange. Do you know that my father never will mention the name of the house."

"Why not, sir?" I asked wondering.

"Why, my gentle Hammersmith, it has been such a singularly unlucky house to all who have lived in it. Do you know why?"

I could not guess.

"Church property, my boy. Built on the site of a

cell of Westminster, granted by Henry to Essex in 1535. Tom Cromwell got it first and lost it; and then Walter Devereux bought it back for name's sake, because it had belonged to an Essex once before, I suppose; and then Robert built the house in one of his fantastic moods. Pretty luck *they* had with it — Devereux the younger will tell you about that — then *we* got it, and a nice mess *we* made of it — there was never a generation without a tragedy. It is a cursed place to the Hillyars. My father would be out of his mind if he knew I were here. The last tragedy was the most fearful."

Frank immediately got up on Emma's lap. Erne did not want to be asked to tell us all about it.

"In 1686," he said, "it was the dower house of Jane, Dowager Lady Hillyar. Her son, Sir Cheyne Hillyar, was a bigoted papist, and, thinking over the misfortunes which had happened to the family lately, attributed them to the possession of this church property, and determined that it should be restored forthwith to the Church, even though it were to that pestilent heretic Adam Littleton, D.D., the then rector of Chelsea; hoping, however, says my father, to see the same reverend doctor shortly replaced, by an orthodox gentleman from the new Jesuit school in the Savoy. But there was a hitch in the proceedings, my dear Jim. There was a party in the bargain who had not been sufficiently considered or consulted. Jane, Lady Hillyar, was, though a strong Catholic, a very obstinate old lady indeed. She refused, in spite of all the spiritual artillery that her son could bring to bear upon her, to have the transfer made during her lifetime;

and, while the dispute was hot between them her son, Sir Cheyne, died.

"Then the old lady's conscience began to torment her. She believed that the house ought to be restored to the Church; but her avarice was opposed to this step, and between her avarice and superstition she went mad.

"All her children had deserted her, save one, a hunch-backed grand-daughter, who came here and lived with her for three months, and who died here. After this poor girl's death, the old woman kept no servants in the house at night, but used to sleep in a room at the top of the house, with her money under her bed. Is there such a room?"

"Yes," I said, "and her ghost walks there now."

"It should," said Erne, "by all reasons, for she was murdered there. They found her dead in the morning, on the threshold between two rooms. She had not been to bed, for she was dressed — dressed in her old grey silk gown, and even had her black mittens on."

Nothing could shake my faith in the ghost after this. The fact of Erne and ourselves, having both heard the same silly story, from apparently different, but really from the same sources, confirmed it beyond suspicion in my mind. The dread I had always had of that room at the top of the house, in which Reuben lived, now deepened into horror — into a horror which was only intensified by what happened there afterwards. Even now, though the room has ceased to exist, the horror most certainly has not.

"But come," said Erne, "let me see this house, which has been so fatal to my family. The weird can-

not extend to me, for we own it no longer. What do you say, Emma; has the luck turned?"

"I fear I must keep you ten years, or perhaps fifty, waiting for an answer," she said. "But even then, I could only tell you what I can now, that your fate is to a very great extent in your own hands."

"You don't believe in destiny, or anything of that sort, then?" said Erne.

"Not the least in the world," she said.

"Then you are no true mussul-woman," said Erne. "Let us come up stairs, and see the haunted mansion. Come on, Emma."

So we went into the empty room upstairs, and Emma showed him the view westward. While they stood together at the window, the sun smote upon their faces with his last ray of glory, and then went down behind the trees; so that, when Erne, Joe, and I started together up stairs to see Reuben's room, it grew darker and darker each step we went.

"A weird, dull place," said Erne, looking around. "There is another room inside this, and the old lady was murdered on the threshold. Does your cousin live here all alone?"

"All alone."

"He must be rather dull."

"The merriest fellow alive."

When we came downstairs, we found my father and mother awaiting us. My mother seemed very much delighted at my having picked up such a fine acquaintance; and my father said,

"Sir, you are welcome. I am glad to see, sir, that my boy Jim is appreciated by gentlemen as well able to judge as yourself." And then my father

proceeded to define the principal excellences of my character. I am sure I hope he was right. My crowning virtue, it appeared — the one that contained the others, and surpassed them — was that I was “all there.” My father assured Erne that he would find that to be the case. That no one had ever ventured to say that it was not the case. That, if any one *did* say so, and was in any ways prepared to maintain his opinion, he would be glad to hear his reasons, and so on; turning the original proposition about my being “all there,” over and over, and inside out, a dozen times. Erne had no idea what he meant, but he knew it was something highly complimentary to me, and so he said he perfectly agreed with my father, and, that he had taken notice of that particular point in my character the very moment he saw me, which was carrying a polite fiction somewhat dangerously far. At last he said he must go, and, turning to my father, asked if he might come again. My father begged he would honour him whenever he pleased, and then he went away, and I walked with him.

“I’ve run away, Jim,” he said, as soon as we were in the street. “I ran away to see you.”

I ventured to express a wish that, at some future time, he might be induced to go back again.

“Yes,” he said, “I shall go back to-morrow. I sleep at a friend’s house here in Chelsea, and I shall go back to-morrow, but I shall come again. Often, I hope.”

When I got home my father was sitting up alone smoking. I sat down opposite to him, and in a few minutes he said —

“A fine young chap that, old man!”

"Very indeed," I said, slightly anxious about the results of the interview.

"Yes! A fine, handsome, manly lad," continued he. "What's his name, by-the-bye?"

I saw the truth must come out.

"His name is Hillyar," I said.

"Christian name?"

"Erne."

"Then you went to Stanlake yesterday?"

"Yes," I said. "We wanted to see it after what you said, and so we went."

My father looked very serious, and sat smoking a long time; at last he said —

"Jim, you mind the night you was bound?"

"Yes."

"And what I told you about Samuel Burton and his young master, that carried on so hard?"

I remembered every word.

"This young Erne Hillyar is his brother. That's why your mother cried when Stanlake was spoke of; and all this has come out of those dratted waterlilies."

And so we went to bed; but I could not sleep at first. I lay awake, thinking of my disobedience, and wondering what complication of results would follow from it. But at last I fell asleep, saying to myself, "Will he come again to-morrow? when will he come again?"

CHAPTER XIV.

The Gleam of the Autumn Sunset.

"ON the 27th, at the Cathedral, by the Right Reverend the Bishop of Palmerston, assisted by the Very Reverend Dean Maberly, of N. S. W., and the Rev. Minimus Smallchange of St. Micros, Little Creek, George Hillyar, Esq. Inspector of Police for the Bumbleoora district, eldest son of Sir George Hillyar, of Stanlake, England, to Gertrude, sixth and last remaining daughter of the late James Neville, Esq. of Neville's Gap."

That was the way the *Sentinel* announced it — "last remaining daughter." In England, one would have thought that all the other daughters were dead! Australians understood the sentence better. It merely meant that all the other sisters were married; that the Miss Nevilles were exhausted; that there wern't any more of them left; that, if you wanted to marry one of these ever so much now, you couldn't do it; and that the market was free to the most eligible young ladies next in succession. That was all the *Sentinel* meant. Dead! Quotha?

Some of the young ladies said: Their word — they were surprised. That, if you had gone down on your knees now, and told them that Gerty was ambitious and heartless, they would not have believed it. That, if you had told them that she was a poor little thing with no manners; that she never could dress herself in colours, and so stuck to white; that she was the colour of a cockatoo when she sat still, and got to be

the colour of a king-parrot the moment she began to dance; that she was a forward little thing, and a shy little thing, and a bold little thing, and an artful little thing, and that her spraining her ankle at the ball at Government House was all an excuse to get on the sofa beside Lord Edward Staunton — they would have believed all this. But they never, never, could have believed that she would have sold herself to that disreputable, smooth-faced creature of a Hillyar, for the sake of his prospective title.

But other young ladies said that Gerty was the sweetest, kindest, best little soul that ever was born. That, if Inspector Hillyar did anything to make her unhappy, he ought to be torn to pieces by wild horses. But that there must be something good in him, or Gerty could never have loved him as she did.

The Secretary, who was cross and uneasy over the whole matter, on being told by his wife about this young-lady tattle, said that the detractors were all of them the daughters of the tradesmen and small farmers — the female part of the Opposition. But this was not true, for Gerty had many friends even among the Opposition. Miss Hurtle, daughter of the radical member for North Palmerston (also an ironmonger in Banks Street), behaved much like Miss Swartz in *Vanity Fair*. She was so overcome at the wedding that she incautiously began to sob; her sobs soon developed themselves into a long discordant bellow, complicated with a spasmodic tattoo of her toes against the front of the pew. The exhibition of smelling salts only rendered her black in the face; they had to resort to stimulants. And, as the procession went out, they were met by the sexton, with brandy-and-water.

The Secretary laughed aloud, and his wife was glad to hear him laugh, for he had been, as she expressed, "as black as thunder" all the morning.

Yes, for good or for evil, it was all over and done; and one might as well laugh as cry. Gerty Neville was Mrs. Hillyar, and the best must be made of it.

The best did not seem so very bad. The Hillyars came and stayed with the Oxtons at the Secretary's house near town, after spending their honeymoon in Sydney, and every day they stayed there, the Secretary's brow grew smoother, and he appeared more reconciled to what had happened.

Gerty seemed as bright as the morning star. A most devoted and proud little wife, proud of herself, proud of her foresight and discretion in making such a choice, and, above all, proud of her cool, calm, gentlemanly husband. Her kind little heart was overflowing with happiness, which took the form of loving kindness for all her fellow-creatures, from the Governor down to the meanest native that lay by the creekside.

"*She* afraid of her terrible father-in-law," she would say, laughing; "let him meet her face to face, and she would bring him on his knees in no time." She was so very lovely, that Mr. and Mrs. Oxton really thought that she might assist to bring about a reconciliation between father and son, though George, who knew more than they, professed to have but little hopes of any change taking place in his father's feelings towards him.

A great and steady change for the better was taking place in George himself. There could be no doubt that he was most deeply and sincerely in love with his wife; and also that, *with her*, this new life did not, as

the Secretary had feared, bore and weary him. It was wonderfully pleasant and peaceful. He had never had *repose* before in his life; and now he began to feel the full beauty of it.

The Secretary saw all this; but his dread was that this new state of being, had come to him too late in life to become habitual. There was the danger.

Still the improvement was marked. He lost the old impatient insolent fall in the eyes when addressed; he lost his old contradictory manner altogether; his voice grew more gentle, and his whole air more cheerful; and, lastly, for the first time in his life, he began to pay little attentions to women. He began to squire Mrs. Oxton about, and to buy flowers for her, and all that sort of thing, and to show her, in a mute sort of way, that he approved of her; and he made himself so agreeable to all his wife's friends that they began to think that she had not done so very badly after all.

He very seldom laughed heartily. Indeed, what little humour he had was dry and caustic, and he never unbent himself to, or was easy and confidential with, any human being — unless it were his wife, when they were alone. His treatment of the Secretary was respectful, nay, even *for him*, affectionate; but he was never free with him. He would talk over his affairs with him, would discuss the chances of a reconciliation with his father, and so on; yet there was no warmth of confidence between them. Neither ever called the other "old fellow," or made the most trifling joke at the other's expense. If you had told the Secretary that he still distrusted George Hillyar, he would have denied it. But, generous and freehearted as the Secretary

was, there was a grain of distrust of his brother-in-law in his heart still.

Thus, even at his best, but one human being *loved* the poor fellow, and that one being was his wife, who, for some reason, adored him. It is quite easy to see that in the times before his marriage he may have been a most unpopular person. Here he is before us now, for the six months succeeding his marriage, a tall, handsome man, of about thirty-one, with a rather pale, hairless face, somewhat silent, somewhat reserved, but extremely self-possessed; very polite and attentive in small things, but yet unable to prevent your seeing that his politeness cost him an effort, — a man striving to forget the learning of a lifetime.

Shortly after his marriage he wrote to his father:

“MY DEAR SIR, — We have been so long and so hopelessly estranged that I have considerable difficulty in knowing in what terms I ought to address you.

“Since I left Wiesbaden, and requested you in future to pay the annual sum of money you are kind enough to allow me into the bank at Sydney, none but the most formal communications have passed between us. The present one shall be as formal as possible, but I fear will trench somewhat on family matters.

“I have been four years in the police service of this colony, and have at last, by a piece of service of which I decline to speak, raised myself to the highest rank obtainable in it.

“In addition to this piece of intelligence, I have to inform you that I have made a most excellent mar-

riage. Any inquiries you may make about the future Lady Hillyar can only be answered in one way.

"Hoping that your health is good, I beg to remain,

"Your obedient son,

"GEORGE HILLYAR."

The answer came in time, as follows:

"MY DEAR GEORGE — I had heard of your brilliant gallantry, and also of your marriage, from another source, before your letter arrived. I highly approve of your conduct in both cases.

"In the place of the 300*l.* which you have been receiving hitherto from me, you will in future receive 1,000*l.* annually. I hope the end has come at last to the career of vice and selfish dissipation in which you have persisted so long.

"I confess that I am very much pleased at what I hear of you this last six months (I am well informed about every movement you make): I had utterly given you up. The way to good fame seems to be plainly before you. I wish I could believe that none of this enormous crop of wild oats, which you have so diligently sown for the last eighteen years, would come up and bear terrible fruit. I wish I could believe that.

"Meanwhile, if your duties call you to England, I will receive you and your wife. But take this piece of advice seriously to heart. Make friends and a career where you are. Mind that.

"Your affectionate father,

"GEORGE HILLYAR."

A cold, cruel, heartless letter. Not one word of

tender forgiveness; not one word of self-blame for the miserable mistakes that he had made with his son in times gone by: the hatred which he felt for him showing out in the prophecies of unknown horrors in what seemed a brighter future. The devil, which had not looked out of George Hillyar's eyes for six months past, looked out now, and he swore aloud.

“‘Make friends and a career where you are.’ So he is going to disinherit me in favour of that cursed young toad Erne.”

CHAPTER XV.

In which the Snake Creeps out of the Grass.

THE place in which he had received this letter was the post-office at Palmerston, one of the principal public buildings of that thriving capital — a majestic and imposing pile of galvanized iron, roofed with tin, twenty feet long, surmounted by a pediment, the apex of which rose fifteen feet from the level of Banks Street, and carried a weathercock.

The mail was just in, and the place was crowded. Roaring for his orderly was of very little use; it only raised a few eager eyes impatiently from their letters, or made a few disappointed idlers wonder what the inspector was hollering after. His orderly had probably got a letter, and was reading it in some secret corner. He would wait for him.

The devil had been in him a few minutes ago; but, as he stood and waited there, in the sweltering little den called the post-office, with all the eager readers of letters around him, the devil began to be beat out

again. There was an atmosphere in that miserable little hot tin-kettle of a post-office which the devil can't stand at all — the atmosphere of home. Old loves, old hopes, old friends, old scenes, old scents, old sounds, are threads which, though you draw them finer than the finest silk, are still stronger than iron. Did you ever hear the streams talk to you in May, when you went a-fishing? Did you ever hear what the first rustle of the summer leaves said to you in June, when you went a-courting? Did you ever hear, as a living voice, the south west wind among the bare ash-boughs in November, when you were out a-shooting? If you have imagination enough to put a voice into these senseless sounds of nature, I should like to stand with you in the Melbourne post-office on a mail-day, and see what sort of voice would speak to you out of the rustling of a thousand fluttering letters, held by trembling fingers, and gazed on by faces which, however coarse and ugly, let the news be good or bad, grow more soft and gentle as the news is read.

Poor George Hillyar. His letter had no hope or comfort in it; and yet, by watching the readers of the other letters, and seeing face after face light up, he got more quiet, less inclined to be violent and rash, less inclined to roar for his orderly, and make a fool of himself before Gerty. He leant against an iron pillar, and fixed his attention on a good-natured-looking young man before him, who was devouring an ill-written, blotted letter with an eagerness and a delight which made his whole face wreath itself into one very large smile.

He was pleased to look at him, and looked at him more earnestly. But, while he looked at him, he found

that he could not concentrate his attention on him. He tried to do so, for this young fellow, by reason of a deficient education, was enjoying his letter amazingly; he was reaping all the pleasures of anticipation and fruition at one and the same time. When he began a sentence, following the words with a grimy forefinger, he grinned because he felt certain that something good was coming; when he had spelt through it he grinned wider still, because it surpassed his expectations. Once, after finishing one of these hardspelt sentences, he looked round radiantly on the crowd, and said confidentially: "I told you so. I know'd she'd have him!"

At this gushing piece of confidence to an unsympathising crowd, poor George Hillyar felt as if he would have liked to meet this young man's eyes and smile at him. But he could not. Somehow, another pair of eyes came between him and everything else — eyes which he could not identify among the crowd, yet which he could feel, and which produced a sensation of sleepy petulance with which he was very familiar. He had read some account of the fascination of snakes, and, because it seemed a bizarre, and rather wicked sort of amusement, he had tried it for himself. He used to go out from the barracks on Sunday afternoon, find a black snake among the stony ridges, engage its attention, and stare at it. The snake would lie motionless, with its beady eyes fixed on him. The fearful stillness of the horrible brute which carried instant death in its mouth, would engage him deeply; and the wearying attention of his eye, expecting some sudden motion of the reptile, would begin to tell upon the brain, and make the watcher, as I have said before,

petulant and dull. At length the snake, gathering confidence from his stillness, would gleam and rustle in every coil, stretch out its quivering neck, and attempt flight. Then his suppressed anger would break forth, and he would arise and smite it, almost careless, for the moment, whether he died himself or no.*

He passed out of the crowd, and came into the portico; the people were standing about, still reading their letters, and his own orderly was sitting, with his feet loose in his stirrups, nearly doubled up in his saddle, reading his letter too, while he held the rein of George Hillyar's horse loosely over his arm. The flies were troublesome, and sometimes the led horse would give such a jerk with his head as would nearly pull the letter out of the orderly's hand; but he did not notice it. He sat doubled up on his saddle, with a radiant eager smile on his face, and read.

Time was when poor Hillyar would have sworn at him, would have said that the force was going to the devil, because a cadet dared to read a letter on duty. But those times were gone by for the present. George Hillyar had been a bully, but was a bully no longer. He waited till his orderly should have finished his letter, and waited the more readily because he felt that those two strange eyes, of which he had been clearly conscious, were plaguing him no more.

So he waited until his orderly had done his letter before he approached him. The orderly, a gentle-

* This is my theory about snake-fascination. The above are the only results I ever arrived at (except a creeping in the calves of my legs, and an intense desire to run away). Dr. Holmes don't quite agree. But I will publicly retract all I have said, if he will promise not to try any further experiments with his dreadful crotali. The author of "Elsie Venner" is far too precious a person for that sort of thing.

looking English lad, with a kind, quiet face, looked on his advance with dismay. He had committed a slight breach of discipline in reading his sister's letter while on duty in the public streets; and Bully Hillyar, the man who never spared or forgave, had caught him. It was a week's arrest.

Nevertheless, he looked bright, pushed the letter into his breast, and wheeled the led horse round ready for the inspector to mount. He *knew*, this sagacious creature, that he was going to catch it, and, so to speak, put up a moral umbrella against the storm of profane oaths which he *knew* would follow.

Will you conceive his astonishment when the inspector, instead of blaspheming at him, took his curb down a link, and said over the saddle, preparing to mount, "What sort of news, Dickenson? Good news, hey?"

Judging by former specimens of George Hillyar's tender mercies, the orderly conceived this to be a kind of diabolical chaff or irony, preparatory to utter verbal demolition and ruin. He feebly said that he was very sorry.

"Pish, man! I am not chaffing. Have you got good news in your letter, hey?"

The astonished and still-distrusting orderly said, "Very good news, sir, thank you."

"Hah!" said George Hillyar. "I haven't. What's your news? Come, tell us."

"My mother is coming out, sir."

"I suppose you are very fond of your mother, arn't you? And she is fond of you, hey?"

"Yes, sir."

"She don't play Tom-fool's tricks, does she? She

wouldn't cut away with a man, and leave you, would she?"

"No, sir."

"If she were to, should you like her all the same, eh?"

"I cannot tell, sir. You will be pleased to close the conversation here, sir. My mother is a lady, and I don't allow any discussion whatever about her possible proceedings."

"I didn't mean to make you angry," said Bully Hillyar, the inspector, to quiet Dickenson, the cadet; "I am very sorry. I am afraid my manner must be unfortunate; for just now, on my honour, I was trying to make a friend of you, and I have only succeeded in making you angry."

Young Dickenson, not a wise being by any means, remembered this conversation all his life. He used to say afterwards that Bully Hillyar had had good points in him, and that he knew it. When George Hillyar was condemned, he used to say, "Well, well! this was bad, and that was bad, but he was a good fellow at bottom." The fact is, that George unbent, and was his better self before this young man. He had been slowly raising himself to a higher level, and was getting hopeful. When he felt those eyes fixed upon him, as he read his letter — which eyes gave him a deadly chill though he had not recognised them — the vague anxiety which possessed him had caused him to be confidential with the first man he met.

So he rode slowly home to the barracks and sat down in his quarters to business, for he had taken the business off the hands of the Palmerston inspector, and had so given him a holiday. The office was a very

pleasant place, opening on the paddock — at this time of year a sheet of golden green turf, shaded by low gum-trees, which let sunbeams through their boughs in all directions, to make a yellow pattern on the green ground. The paddock sloped down to the river, which gleamed a quarter of a mile off among the tree-stems.

It was a perfectly peaceful day in the very early spring. The hum of the distant town was scarcely perceptible, and there was hardly a sound in the barracks. Sometimes a few parrots would come whistling through the trees; sometimes a horse would neigh in the paddock; sometimes a lazily-moved oar would sound from the river; but quiet content and peace were over every thing.

Even the two prisoners in the yard had ceased to talk, and sat silent in the sun. A trooper going into the stable, and two or three horses neighing, to him was an event. George Hillyar sat and thought in the stillness, and his thoughts were pleasant, and held him long.

At length he was aroused by voices in the yard — one that of a trooper.

"I tell you he's busy."

"But I really must see him," said the other voice. "I bring important information."

George listened intently.

"I tell you," said the trooper, "he is busy. Why can't you wait till he comes out?"

"If you don't do my message, mate, you'll repent it."

"You're a queer card to venture within a mile of a police-station at all; leave alone being cheeky when you are in the lion's jaws."

"Never you mind about that," said the other. "You mind your business half as well as I mind mine, and you'll be a man before your mother now. What a pretty old lady she must be, if she's like you. More moustache though, ain't she? How's pussy? I was sorry for the old gal getting nabbed, but —"

As it was perfectly evident that there would, in one instant more, be a furious combat of two, and that George would have to give one of his best troopers a week's arrest, he roared out to know what the noise was about.

"A Sydney sider, sir, very saucy, and insists upon seeing you."

"Show him in then. Perhaps he brings information."

The man laid George's revolver on the table, put the newspaper carelessly over it, saluted, and withdrew. Directly afterward the evil face of Samuel Burton was smiling in the doorway, and George Hillyar's heart grew cold within him.

CHAPTER XVI.

James Burton's Story: Erne and Emma.

My dear father's religious convictions were, and are, eminently orthodox. He had been born and bred under the shadow of a great Kentish family, and had in his earlier years — until the age of manhood, indeed — contemplated the act of going to church anywhere but at the family church in the park as something little less than treason. So when, moved by ambition, he

broke through old routine so far as to come to London and establish himself, he grew fiercer than ever in his orthodoxy; and, having made such a desperate step as *that*, he felt that he must draw a line somewhere. He must have some holdfast to his old life; so his devotion to the Establishment was intense and jealous. The habit he had of attending church in all weathers on Sunday morning, and carefully spelling through the service, got to be so much a part of himself that, when our necessities compelled us to render ourselves to a place where you couldn't go to church if you wished it, the craving after the old habit made my father most uneasy and anxious, as far on in the week as Tuesday afternoon; about which time the regret for the churchless Sunday just gone by would have worn itself out. But then the cloud of the equally churchless Sunday approaching would begin to lower down about Thursday afternoon, and grow darker as the day approached; so that for the first six months of our residence in our new home, our Saturday evenings were by no means what they used to be. And yet I can hardly say that my father was at this time a devout man. I think it was more a matter of custom.

Of political convictions, my father had none of any sort or kind whatever. He sternly refused to qualify himself, or to express any opinion on politics, even among his intimates at the Black Lion on Saturday evening. The reason he gave was, that he had a large family, and that custom was custom. Before you condemn him you must remember that he had never had a chance in his life of informing himself on public affairs, and that he showed a certain sort of dogged wisdom in refusing to be led by the nose by the idle

and ignorant chatterboxes against whom he was thrown in the parlour of the publichouse.

I wish he had shown half as much wisdom with regard to another matter, and I wish I and Joe had been a few years older before he went so far into it. Joe and I believed in him, and egged him on, as two simple, affectionate boys might be expected to do. The fact is, as I have hinted before, that my father had considerable mechanical genius, and was very fond of inventing; but then he was an utterly ignorant man, could scarcely read and write, and knew nothing of what attempts, and what failures had been made before his time.

As ill luck would have it, his first attempt in this line was a great success. He invented a centrifugal screw-plate, for cutting very long and large male screws almost instantaneously. He produced the handles of an ordinary screw-plate (carrying a nut two inches diameter) two feet each way, and weighted them heavily at the ends. This, being put on a lathe, was made to revolve rapidly, and by means of an endless screw, approached the bar of iron to be operated on when it was spinning at its extreme velocity. It caught the bar and ran up it as though it were wood, cutting a splendid screw. A large building firm, who needed these great screws for shores, and centres of arches, and so on, bought the patent from my father for seventy pounds.

This was really a pretty and useful invention. My mother went blazing down the street to church in a blue silk gown and a red bonnet, and the gold and marqueterie in Lord Dacre's great monument paled before her glory. It was all very well, and would

have been better had my father been content to leave well alone.

But he wasn't. I never knew a man worth much who was. The very next week he was hard at work on his new treadle-boat. We were saved from *that*. The evil day was staved off by Erne Hillyar.

Joe, among other benefits he was receiving as head boy at the parochial school, was getting a fair knowledge of mechanical drawing; so he had undertaken to make the drawings for this new invention. I had undertaken to sit next him and watch, keeping Fred quiet; my father sat on the other side; Frank lay on his back before the fire singing softly; and the rest were grouped round Harry. Emma went silently hither and thither about housework, only coming now and then to look over Joe's shoulder; while my mother sat still beside the fire with her arms folded, buried in thought. She had been uneasy in her mind all the evening; the greengrocer had told her that potatoes would be dear that autumn, and that "Now is your time, Mrs. Burton, and I can't say no fairer than that." She had argued the matter, in a rambling, desultory way, with any one who would let her, the whole evening, and was now arguing it with herself. But all of a sudden she cried out, "Lord a mercy!" and rose up.

It was not any new phase in the potato-question which caused her exclamation; it was Erne Hillyar. "I knocked, Mrs. Burton," he said, "and you did not hear me. May I come in?"

We all rose up to welcome him, but he said he would go away again if we did not sit exactly as we were; so we resumed our positions, and he came and

sat down beside me, and leant over me, apparently to look at Joe's drawing.

"I say, Jim," he whispered, "I have run away again."

I whispered, "Wouldn't his pa be terrible anxious?"

"Not this time he won't. He will get into a wax this time. I don't want him to know where I come. If I go to the Parkers, they will tell him I don't spend all the time with them. I shall leave it a mystery."

I was so glad to see him, that I was determined to make him say something which I liked to hear. I said, "Why do you come here, sir?"

"To see you, gaby," he said; and I laughed. "And to see Emma also: so don't be conceited. What are you doing?"

My father and Joe explained the matter to him, and his countenance grew grave, but he said nothing. Very soon afterwards Emma and he and I had managed to get into a corner together by the fire, and were talking together confidentially.

Erne told Emma of his having run away, and she was very angry with him. She said that, if he came so again, she would not speak one word to him. Erne pleaded with her, and defended himself. He said I was the only friend he had ever made, and that it was hard if he was never to see me. She said that was true, but that he should not do it in an underhand way. He said he must do it so, or not do it at all. She said that her brother was not one that need be run away to, or sought in holes and corners. He said that she knew nothing of the world and its prejudices, and that he should take his own way. She said it was time for Fred to go to bed, and she must wish him good night;

so they quarrelled, until Fred's artificial shell — pinafore, frock, and all the rest of it — was unbuttoned and unhooked, and nothing remained but to slip him out of it all, and stand him down, with nothing on but his shoes and stockings, to warm his stomach by the fire. When this was done Erne came round and hoped she wasn't angry with him. He said he would always try to do as she told him, but that he must and would come and see us. And she smiled at him again, and said she was sure that we three would always love one another, as long as we lived; and then, having put on Fred's nightgown, she carried him up to bed, singing as she went.

When Erne had done looking after her, he turned to me, and said:

"Jim, she is right. I must not come sneaking here. I must have it out with the governor. I have told old Compton about it, and sworn him to secrecy. Now for some good news. Do you remember what you told me about the Thames?"

"Do you mean how it was getting to stink?"

"No, you great Hammersmith. I mean about sailing up it in a boat, as Joe and you and your cousin did; and all the tulip-trees and churches and tea-gardens." I dimly perceived that Erne wished me to take the æsthetical and picturesque view of the river, rather than the sanitary and practical. By way of showing him I understood him I threw in:

"Ah! and the skittle-alleys and flag-staffs."

"Exactly," he said. "It's a remarkable fact, that in my argument with my father I dwelt on that very point — that identical point, I assure you. There's your skittles again, I said; there's a manly game for

you. He didn't see it in that light at first, I allow; because he told me not to be an ass. But I have very little doubt I made an impression on him. At all events, I have gained the main point; you will allow that I triumphed."

I said "Yes;" I am sure I don't know why. I liked to have him there talking to me, and would have said "Yes" to anything. We two might have rambled on for a long while, if Joe, who had come up, and was standing beside me, had not said,

"How, sir, may I ask?"

"Why, by getting him to take a house at Kew. I am to go to school at Dr. Mayby's, and we are going to keep boats and punts and things. And I am going to see whether that pleasant cousin of yours, of whom you have told me, can be induced to come up and be our waterman, and teach me to row. Where is your cousin by-the-bye?"

He was out to-night, we said. He might be in any moment. Erne said, "No matter. Now, Mr. Burton, I want to speak to you, and to Joe."

My father was all attention. Erne took the drawings of the treadle-boat from my father, and told him that the thing had been tried fifty times, and had failed utterly as compared with the oar; that, with direct action, you could not gain sufficient velocity of revolution; and that, if you resorted to multiplying gear, the loss of power sustained by friction was so enormous as to destroy the whole utility of the invention. He proved his case clearly. Joe acquiesced, and so did my father. The scheme was abandoned there and then; and I was left wondering at the strange mixture of sound common sense, knowledge of the subject, and simplicity of lan-

guage, which Erne had shown. I soon began to see that he had great talents and very great reading, but that, from his hermit-like life, his knowledge of his fellow-creatures was lower than Harry's.

He had got a bed, it appeared, at the Cadogan Hotel, in Sloane Street, and I walked home with him. I was surprised, I remember, to find him, the young gentleman who had just put us so clearly right on what was an important question to us, and of which we were in the deepest ignorance, asking the most simple questions about the things in the shop-windows and the people in the streets — what the things (such common things as bladders of lard and barrels of size) were used for, and what they cost? The costermongers were a great source of attraction to him, for the King's Road that night was nearly as full of them as the New Cut. "See here, Jim," he said; "here is a man with a barrow full of the common murex; do they eat them?" I replied that we ate them with vinegar, and called them whelks. Periwinkles he knew, and recognised as old friends, but tripe was a sealed book to him. I felt such an ox-like content and complacency in hearing his voice and having him near me, that we might have gone on examining this world, so wonderfully new to him, until it was too late to get into his hotel; but he luckily thought of it in time. I, remembering the remarks of a ribald station-master on a former occasion, did not go within reach of the hotel-lights. We parted affectionately, and so ended his second visit.

CHAPTER XVII.

Erne and Reuben.

THE next morning my father and I were informed that Mr. Compton would be glad to speak to us; and, on going indoors, there he was, as comfortable and as neat as ever.

"Well, Burton," he said, cheerily, "how does the world use you? As you deserve apparently, for you haven't grown older this fifteen years."

My father laughed, and said, "Better, he was afeared. His deservings weren't much. And how was Mr. Compton?"

"Well, thankee. Anything in my way? Any breach of patent, eh? Remember me when your fortune's made. What a hulking great fellow Jim is getting! What do you give him to eat, hey, to make him grow so?"

My father was delighted to give any information to his old friend. He began to say that sometimes I had one thing and sometimes another — maybe, one day beef and another mutton. "Jints, you understand," said my father; "none of your kag-mag and skewer bits —"

"And a pretty good lot of both, I'll be bound. Was Erne here last night, Jim?"

You might have knocked me down with a feather. I had not the wildest notion that Mr. Compton, a very old acquaintance of my father, knew anything about the Hillyars. I said, "Yes."

"I am very glad to hear it," he said. "There's a

devil of a row about him at home. I hope he has gone back."

I said that he was gone back.

My father said, "Look here, Mr. Compton. I cannot say how glad I am you came to-day, of all men. I and my wife are in great trouble about Master Erne and his visits, and we don't rightly know what to do."

"I am in trouble also about the boy," said Mr. Compton; "but I *do* know what to do."

"So sure am I of that, sir," said my father, "that I was going to look you up, and ask your advice."

"And I came down to consult with you; so here we are. How much does Jem know about all this?"

"A good deal," said my father; "and, if you please, I should wish him to know everything."

"Very well, then," continued Mr. Compton, "I will speak before him as if he was not here. You know this young gentleman has not been brought up in an ordinary way — that he knows nothing of the world; consequently I was terribly frightened as to where he might have run away to. When he told me where he had been, I was easy in my mind, but determined to come and speak to you, whom I have known from a child. What I ask you is, Encourage him here, Burton and Jim, but don't let any one else get hold of him. He can get nothing but good in your house, I know. By what strange fatality he selected *your* family to visit I cannot conceive. It was a merciful accident."

I told him about the yellow water-lilies.

"Hah," he said, "that removes the wonder of it. Now about his father."

"I should think," said my father, "that Sir George

would hardly let him come here, after hearing our name?"

"He does not know that you are any connexion with our old friend Samuel. I don't see why we should tell him — I don't, indeed. It is much better to let bygones be bygones."

"Do you know that *his* son lives with us now?"

"Yes. You mean Reuben. How is he going on?"

"Capital — as steady and as respectable as possible."

"Well, then," said Mr. Compton, "for *his* sake we should not be too communicative. Sir George knows nothing of you. He only knows your name from my having unfortunately recommended Samuel to him. I think, if you will take my advice, we will keep our counsel. Good-bye, old friend."

Mr. Compton and my father were playfellows. The two families came from the same village in Kent, and Mr. Compton had, unfortunately, recommended Samuel Burton to Sir George Hillyar.

Three days afterwards Erne came in, radiant. "It was all right," he said; "he was to come whenever he could get away."

"We had an awful row though," he continued; "I got old Compton to come home with me. 'Where have you been, sir?' my father said in an awful voice, and I said I had been seeing my friends, the Burtons, who were blacksmiths — at least all of them except the women and children — in Church Place, Chelsea. He stormed out that, if I must go and herd with blackguards, I might choose some of a less unlucky name, and frequent a less unlucky house. I said I didn't name them, and that therefore *that* part of the argument was

disposed of; and that, as for being blackguards, they were far superior in *every point* to any family I had ever seen; and that their rank in life was as high as that of my mother, and therefore high enough for me. He stood aghast at my audacity, and old Compton came to my assistance. He told me afterwards that I had showed magnificent powers of debate, but that I must be careful not to get a habit of hard-hitting — Lord knows what he meant. He told my father that these Burtons were really everything that was desirable, and went on no end about you. Then I told him that I had his own sanction for my proceedings, for that he himself had given me leave to make your acquaintance. He did not know that it was *you* I had been to see, and was mollified somewhat. I was ordered to leave the room. When I came back again, I just got the tail of the storm, which was followed by sunshine. To tell you the truth, he came to much easier than I liked. But here we are, at all events."

We sat and talked together for a short time; and, while we were talking, Reuben came in. Erne was sitting with his back towards the door; Reuben advanced towards the fire from behind him, and, seeing a young gentleman present, took off his cap and smoothed his hair. How well I can remember those two faces together. The contrast between them impressed me in a vague sort of way even then; I could not have told you why at that time, though I might now. Men who only get educated somewhat late in life, like myself, receive impressions and recognize facts, for which they find no reason till long after: so those two faces, so close together, puzzled me even then for an instant, for there was a certain similarity

of expression, though probably none in feature. There was a look of reckless audacity in both faces — highly refined in that of Erne, and degenerating into mere devil-may-care, cockney impudence in that of Reuben. Joe, who was with me, remarked that night in bed, that either of them, if tied up too tight, would break bounds and become lawless. That was true enough, but I saw more than that. Among other things, I saw that there was far more determination in Erne's beautiful set mouth than in the ever-shifting lips of my cousin Reuben. I also saw another something, to which, at that time, I could give no name.

Reuben came and leant against the fire-place, and I introduced him. Erne immediately shook hands and made friends. We had not settled to talk when Emma came in, and, after a kind greeting between Erne and her, sat down and began her work.

"You're a waterman, are you not, Reuben?" said Erne.

Reuben was proud to say he was a full waterman.

"It is too good luck to contemplate," said Erne; "but we want a waterman, in our new place at Kent, to look after boats and attend me when I bathe, to see I don't drown myself. I suppose you wouldn't — eh?"

Reuben seemed to think he would rather like it. He looked at Emma.

"Just what I mean," said Erne. "What do you say, Emma?"

Emma looked steadily at Reuben, and said quietly:

"If it suits Reuben, sir, I can answer for him. Answer for him in every way. Tell me, Reuben. Can I answer for you?"

Reuben set his mouth almost as steadily as Erne's, and said she might answer for him.

"Then will you come?" said Erne. "That will be capital. Don't you think it will be glorious, Emma?"

"I think it will be very nice, sir. It will be another link between you and my brother."

"And between myself and you."

"That is true also," said Emma. "And I cannot tell you how glad I am of that, because I like you so very, very much. Next to Jim, and Joe, and Reuben, I think I like you better than any boy I know."

CHAPTER XVIII.

James Burton's Story: Reuben and Sir George Hillyar.

GOLDEN hours, which can never come back any more. Hours as peaceful and happy as the close of a summer Sabbath, among dark whispering elm-woods, or on quiet downs, aloft above the murmuring village. Was it on that evening only, or was it on many similar evenings, that we all sat together, in a twilight which seemed to last for hours, before the fire, talking quietly together? Why, when at this distance of time I recall those gatherings before the fire, in the quaint draughty old room, do I always think of such things as these? — of dim, vast cathedrals, when the service is over, and the last echoes of the organ seem still rambling in the roof, trying to break away after their fellows towards heaven — of quiet bays between lofty chalk headlands, where one lies and basks the long summer day before the gently murmuring surf — of very old churches, where the monuments of the dead are

crowded thick together, and the afternoon sun slopes in on the kneeling and lying effigies of men who have done their part in the great English work, and are waiting, without care, without anxiety, for their wages? Why does my rambling fancy, on these occasions, ever come back again to the long series of peaceful images — to crimson sunsets during a calm in mid ocean — to high green capes, seen from the sea, the sides of whose long-drawn valleys are ribbed with grey rocks — to curtains of purple dolomite, seen from miles away across the yellow plain, cut in the centre by a silver waterfall — to great icebergs floating on the calm blue sea — to everything, in short, which I have seen in my life which speaks of peace? And why, again, do I always come at last to the wild dim blue promontory, whose wrinkled downs are half obscured by clouds of wind-driven spray?

How many of these evenings were there? There must have been a great many, because I remember that Reuben came home for the winter one dead dread November night, and Erne accompanied him and stayed for an hour. I cannot say how long they lasted. A year or two, first and last.

What arose out of them that is noticeable is soon told. In the first place, this period constituted a new era in Joe's life. Erne's books and Erne's knowledge and assistance were at his service, and he soon, as Erne told me, began to bid fair to be a distinguished scholar. "He not only had perseverance and memory, but genius also," said Erne. "He sees the meaning of a thing quicker than I do. Joe is far cleverer than I."

At first I had been a little anxious about one thing,

though I have never named my anxiety to any one. I was afraid lest Reuben should become jealous of Erne, and stay away from us. It was not so. Reuben grew devoted to Erne, and seemed pleased with his admiration of Emma. I began to see that Emma's influence over Reuben, great as it was, arose more from a sincere respect and esteem on his part than anything else. I was therefore glad to find that nothing was likely to interfere with it. As for Erne, he had fallen most deeply in love with her, and I had seen it from the beginning.

I, for my part, in my simplicity, could see no harm in that. In fact, it seemed to me an absolutely perfect arrangement that these two should pass their lives in a fool's paradise together. As for my father and mother, they looked on us all as a parcel of children, and nothing more; and, besides, they both had the blindest confidence in Emma, child as she was. At all events, I will go bail that no two people ever lived less capable of any design on Erne's rank or property. I insult them by mentioning such a subject.

Whether it was that I had represented Sir George Hillyar to Reuben as a very terrible person, or whether it was that Reuben's London assurance would not stand the test of the chilling atmosphere of the upper classes, I cannot say; but Reuben was cowed. When the time came for him to fulfil his engagement to go to Kew and take care of Sir George Hillyar's boats, he grew anxious and fidgetty, and showed a strong tendency to back out of the whole business.

"I say, Emma, old woman," he said, the night before I was to go with him and introduce him, "I wish I was well out of this here?"

"Well out of what, Reuben?" said Emma. — "And nobody but the child and the two angels knew as the crossing-sweeper boy was gone to heaven; but, when they got up there, he was awaiting for 'em, just as the angel in blue had told the angel in pink silk and spangles he would be." (This last was only the tail of some silly story which she had been telling the little ones; it has nothing to do with the Plot).

"Why, well out of going up to Kew, to look after these boats. The old co— gentleman, I should say, is a horrid old painted Mussulman. When he do go on the war-train, which is twenty-four hours a day — no allowance for meals — he is everlastingly a-digging up of his tommyawk. All the servants is prematurely grey; and, if the flowers don't blow on the very day set down in the gardening column of *Bell's Life*, he's down on the gardeners, till earthquakes and equinoxials is a fool to him."

"Ain't you talking nonsense, Reuben?" said Emma.

"May be," said Reuben, quietly. "But, by all accounts, he is the most exasperating bart as ever was since barts was, which was four years afore the first whycount married the heiress of the great cod liver-oil manufacturer at Battersea. It flew to his lower extremities," continued Reuben, looking in a comically defiant manner at Emma, and carefully putting the fire together; "and he drank hisself to death with it. He died like a bus-horse, in consequence of the grease getting into his heels. Now!"

"Have you quite done, Reuben?" asked Emma.

Reuben said he had finished for the present.

"Then," said Emma, "let me tell you that you are very foolish in prejudicing yourself against this gen-

tleman from what you have heard at the waterside, since he came to Kew. However, I am not altogether sorry, for you will find him quite different — quite different, I assure you.”

It was bed-time, and we all moved upstairs together in a compact body, on account of Frank. That tiresome young monkey Harry, in an idle hour — when, as Dr. Watts tells us, Satan is ready to find employment — had told Frank that the Guy Fawkeses lived under the stairs, and had produced the most tiresome complications. The first we heard of it was one day when Frank was helping Fred downstairs. Fred was coming carefully down one step at a time, sucking his thumb the while, and holding on by Frank, when Frank suddenly gave a sharp squeal, and down the two came, fifteen stairs, on to the mat at the bottom. To show the extraordinary tricks which our imaginations play with us at times — to show, indeed, that Mind does sometimes triumph over Matter — I may mention that Frank (the soul of truth and honesty) declared positively that he had seen an arm clothed in blue cloth, with brass buttons at the wrist, thrust itself through the banisters, and try to catch hold of his leg. On observing looks of incredulity, he added that the Hand of the Arm was full of brimstone matches, and that he saw the straw coming out at its elbows. After this a strong escort was necessary every night, when he went to bed. He generally preferred going up pick-a-back on Reuben's broad shoulders, feeling probably safer about the legs.

How well I remember a little trait of character that night. Fred conceived it more manly to walk up to bed without the assistance even of Emma. When we

were half-way up the great staircase, Reuben, carrying Frank, raised an alarm of Guy Fawkeses. We all rushed screaming and laughing up the stairs, and, when we gained the landing, and looked back, we saw that we had left Fred behind, in the midst of all the dreadful peril which we had escaped. But the child toiled steadily and slowly on after us, with a broad smile on his face, refusing to hurry himself for all the Guy Fawkeses in the world. When he got his Victoria Cross at Delhi for staying behind, that he might bring poor Lieutenant Tacks back on his shoulders, to die among English faces, I thought of this night on the stairs at Chelsea. He hurried no faster out of that terrible musketry fire in the narrow street than he did from the Guy Fawkeses on the stairs. Among all Peel's heroes, there was no greater hero than our big-headed Fred.

Reuben, who had to toil upstairs to his lonely haunted room at the top of the house, asked me to come with him. Of course I went, though, great lubberly lad as I was, I remember having an indistinct dread of coming down again by myself.

There was a dull fire burning, and the great attic looked horribly ghostly; and, as I sat before the fire, strange unearthly draughts seemed to come from the deserted, and still more ghostly room beyond, which struck now on this shoulder and now on that, with a chill, as if something was laying its hand on me. Reuben had lit a candle, but that did not make matters better, but a great deal worse; for, when I looked at his face by the light of it, I saw that he looked wild and wan, and was ashy pale.

He took a letter from the pocket of his pea jacket,

and burnt it. Before it was quite consumed he turned to me, and said:

"Jim, Jim, old chap, you won't desert me, will you, when it comes, and I can't see or speak to Emma or the kids any more? You will go between us sometimes, and tell her and them that I am only stupid old Reuben, as loves 'em well, by G—; and that I ain't changed in spite of all?"

I was infinitely distressed. The fact is, that I loved my cousin Reuben — in a selfish way, perhaps. I had a certain quantity of rough, latent humour, but no power of expression. Reuben, on a mere hint from me of some gross incongruity, would spin out yard after yard of verbose, fantastic nonsense to the text which I had given him. He was necessary to me, and I was fond of him in consequence.

"Reuben, old boy," said, "I'll go to death with you. I'll never, never desert you, I tell you. If you have been led away, Reuben, why, you may be led back again." I took his hand, and *felt* that I was as pale as he. "Is it — is it — anything that will take you for long, Rube? Shall you go abroad, Rube?" And here, like a young fool, I burst out crying.

"Lord bless his faithful heart!" said Reuben in his old manner. "I haven't been doing of nothink. But, Jim, what was it you said just now?"

I said, "What did he mean? 'that I could follow him to death'?"

He said, "Yes; that is what I meant. And, Jim, old chap, it *runs* to that. Not for me, but for others. In my belief, Jim, it runs to that. Joe could tell us, but we musn't ask Joe. Joe's a chap as is rising fast, and musn't be pulled down by other folk's troubles.

Lawyers could tell us — but, Lord love you, we musn't ask no lawyers. We'd best know nothing about it than ask they. And *you* musn't *know* nothing either; only don't desert me, old Jim."

I said again that I would not. And, if ever I kept my word, I kept that promise.

"I know you won't," he said, with that strange mixture of shrewdness, rough honour, and recklessness which one finds among Londoners; "but then, Jim, if you are true to me, you will have, may be, to know and not to know at one and the same time, to go with a guilty breast among the little ones, and before Emma. Better leave me, Jim; better leave me while you can."

I declared I would not; but that I would stick by him and give him a good word when he wanted it. And then, at his solicitation, I stayed with him all night. Once he woke and cried out that the barge had got too far down the river, and was drifting out to sea. Then that the corpses of all the people who had committed suicide on the bridges were rising up and looking at us. I slept but little after this, and was glad when morning dawned.

But the next morning Reuben was as bright, as brisk, and as nonsensical as ever. He defied Emma. She ventured to hope that he would be steady, and not attend to everything he heard about people without inquiry. He said he was obliged to her, and wouldn't; that he had left three or four pair of old boots upstairs, and, if she'd be good enough to send 'em to the beadle and get 'em darned, he'd thank her. The passion and earnestness of last night was all gone apparently. Nothing was to be got from him, even by Emma, but

chaff and nonsense. The true London soul revolted from, and was ashamed of, the passion of last night. Even with me he seemed half ashamed and half captious.

We were not very long in getting to Kew. Early as we were, the servants had to inform us that Sir George and Mr. Erne had gone out riding. We waited in the servants' hall, in and out of which grey-headed servants came now and then to look, it would seem, at the strange sight of two round young faces like ours. About nine o'clock, the butler came and asked us to come to prayers, and we went up into a great room, where breakfast was laid, and made the end of a long row of servants, sitting with our backs against a great sideboard, while a grey-headed old gentleman read a very long prayer. The moment we were alone together Reuben, who was in a singularly nervous and insolent mood, objected to this prayer in language of his own, which I shall not repeat. He objected that three-quarters of it was consumed in conveying information to the Deity, concerning our own unworthiness and His manifold greatness and goodness; and that altogether it was as utterly unlike the Lord's Prayer or any of the Church prayers as need be.

I was very anxious about him. I dreaded the meeting between him and the terrible old baronet. I was glad when things came to a crisis. We saw Sir George come riding across the park on a beautiful swift-stepping grey cob, accompanied by Erne on a great, nearly thorough-bred chestnut. They were talking merrily together and laughing. They were certainly a splendid couple, though Erne would have looked to better advantage on a smaller horse. They rode into the stable-

yard, where we were instructed to wait for them, and dismounted.

"That," said Sir George Hillyar, advancing and pointing sternly at me with his riding-whip, "is the boy Burton. I have seen him before."

This previous conviction was too damning to be resisted. I pleaded guilty.

"And that?" said he, turning almost fiercely upon Reuben.

Erne stood amused, leaving us to fight our own battle. I said it was Rube.

"Who?" said Sir George.

"Reuben, my cousin," I said, "that was come to take care of his honour's boats."

Sir George looked at Reuben for full a minute without speaking, and then he said, "Come here, you young monkey."

As Reuben approached, utterly puzzled by this style of reception, I noticed a look of curiosity on Sir George's face. When Reuben stood before him, quick as light Sir George turned and looked at Erne for one second, and then looked at Reuben again. Steadily gazing at him, he pointed the handle of his riding-whip towards him, and said, "Look here, sirrah, do you hear? You are to have fifteen shillings a week and are to put three half-crowns in the savings'-bank. You are to get up at seven, to say your prayers, to clean the boats, and offer to help the gardener. If he is fool enough to accept your offer, you may tell him that you weren't hired to work in the garden. If Mr. Erne bathes, you are to row round and round him in a boat, and try to prevent his drowning himself. If he does, you are to send a servant to me, informing me

of the fact, and go for the drags. If such a casualty should occur, you are to consider your engagement as terminated that day week. I object to skittles, to potting at public-houses, and to running along the towing-path like a lunatic, bellowing at the idiots who row boat-races. Any conversation with my son Erne on the subjects of pigeon-shooting, pedestrianism, bagatelle, all-fours, toy-terriers, or Nonconformist doctrines, will lead to your instant dismissal. Do you understand?"

I did not; but Erne and Reuben did. They understood that the old man had taken a fancy to Reuben, and was making fun. They both told me this, and of course I saw they were right at once. Still, I was puzzled at one thing more. Why, after he had turned away, did the old gentleman come back after a few steps, and lay his hands on Reuben's shoulders, looking eagerly into his face? Could he see any likeness to his father — to the man who had used him so cruelly — to Samuel Burton? I could not think so. It must have been merely an old man's fancy for Reuben's handsome, merry countenance; for Sir George pushed him away with a smile, and bade him go about his business.

CHAPTER XIX.

Samuel Burton goes into the licensed Victualling Line.

As Samuel Burton came, hat in hand, with bent and cringing body, into George Hillyar's office in the barracks at Palmerston, George Hillyar turned his chair round towards him; and when the door was shut

behind him, and the trooper's footfall had died away, he still sat looking firmly at him, without speaking.

George could not *turn* pale, for he was already pale; he could not look anxious, for he had always a worn look about his eyes. He merely sat and stared steadily at the bowing convict, with a look of inquiry in his face. The convict spoke first:

"I have not seen your honour for many years."

"Not for many years," said George Hillyar.

"I have been in trouble since I had the pleasure of seeing your honour."

"So I understand, Samuel," said George.

"Thank you, Master George, for that kind expression. You have not forgot me. Thank you, sir."

"You and I are not likely to forget one another, are we?" said George Hillyar.

"I have noticed," said the convict, "in a somewhat chequered career, that the memories of gentlefolks were weak, and wanted jogging at times —"

"Look here," said George Hillyar, rising coolly, and walking towards the man. "Let me see you try to jog mine. Let me see you only once attempt it. Do you hear? Just try. Are you going to threaten, hey? D — n you; just try it, will you. Do you hear?"

He not only heard, but he minded! As George Hillyar advanced towards him, he retreated, until at last, being able to go no further, he stood upright against the weather-boards of the wall, and George stood before him, pointing at him with his finger.

"Bah!" said George Hillyar, after a few seconds, going back to his chair. "Why do you irritate me?"

You should know my temper by this time, Samuel. I don't want to quarrel with you."

"I am sure you don't, sir," said Burton.

"Why are you sure I don't?" snarled George, looking at him angrily. "Why, ah? Why are you sure that I don't want to quarrel with you, and be rid of you for ever? Hey?"

"Oh dear! I am sure I don't know, sir. I meant no offence. I am very humble and submissive. I do assure you, Mr. George, that I am very submissive. I didn't expect such a reception, sir. I had no reason to. I have been faithful and true to you, Mr. George, through everything. I am a poor miserable used-up man, all alone in the world. Were I ever such a traitor, Mr. George, I am too old and broken by trouble, though not by years, to be dangerous."

The cat-like vitality, which showed itself in every movement of his body, told another story though. George Hillyar saw it, and he saw also, now that he had an instant for reflection, that he had made a sad mistake in his way of receiving the man. The consciousness of his terrible blunder came upon him with a sudden jar. He had shown the man, in his sudden irritation, that he distrusted and hated him; and he had sense to see, that no cajolery or flattery would ever undo the mischief which he had made, by his loss of temper, and by a few wild words. He saw by the man's last speech, that the miserable convict had some sparks of love left for his old master, until he had wilfully trampled them out in his folly. He saw, now it was too late, that he might have negotiated successfully on the basis of their old association; and at the same time that he, by a few cruel words, had

rendered it impossible. The poor wretch had come to him in humility, believing him to be the last person left in the world who cared for him. George had rudely broken his fancy by his causeless suspicion, and put the matter on a totally different footing.

He clumsily tried to patch the matter up. He said, "There, I beg your pardon; I was irritated and nervous. You must forget all I have said."

"And a good deal else with it, sir, I am afraid," said Burton. "Never mind, sir; I'll forget it all. I am wiser than I was."

"Now don't *you* get irritated," said George, "because that would be very ridiculous, and do no good to any one. If you can't stand my temper after so many years, we shall never get on."

"I am not irritated, sir. I came to you to ask for your assistance, and you seem to have taken it into your head that I was going to threaten you with old matters. I had no intention of anything of the sort. I merely thought you might have a warm place left in your heart for one who served you so well, for evil or for good. I am very humble, sir. If I were ungrateful enough to do so, I should never dare to try a game of bowls with an inspector of police, in this country, sir. I only humbly ask for your assistance."

"Samuel," said George Hillyar, "we have been mistaking one another."

"I think we have, sir," said Burton.

And, although George looked up quickly enough, the sly scornful expression was smoothed out of Burton's face, and he saw nothing of it.

"I am sure we have," continued George. "Just be reasonable. Suppose I *did* think at first, that you

were going to try to extort money from me: why, then, it all comes to this, that I was mistaken. Surely that is enough of an apology."

"I need no apologies, Mr. George. As I told you before, I am only submissive. I am your servant still, sir. Only your servant."

"What am I to do for you, Samuel? Anything?"

"I came here to-day, sir, to ask a favour. The fact is, sir, I came to ask for some money. After what has passed, I suppose, I may go away again. Nevertheless, sir, you needn't be afraid of refusing. I haven't — haven't — Well, never mind; all these years to turn Turk at last, with such odds against me, too."

"How much do you want, Samuel?" said George Hillyar.

"I'll tell you, sir, all about it. A man who owes me money, an old mate of mine, is doing well in a public-house at Perth, in West Australia. He has written to me to say that, if I will come, I shall go into partnership for the debt. It is a great opening for me; I shall never have to trouble you again. Thirty pounds will make a gentleman of me just now. I say nothing of your getting rid of me for good —"

"You need say nothing more, Samuel," said George. "I will give you the money. What ship shall you go by?"

"The *Windsor* sails next week, sir, and calls at King George's Sound. That would do for me."

"Very well, then," said George; "here is the money; go by her. It is better that we separate. You see that these confidences, these long *tête-à-têtes*, be-

tween us are not reputable. I mean no unkindness; you must see it."

"You are right, sir. It shall not happen again. I humbly thank you, sir. And I bid you good day."

He was moving toward the door, when George Hillyar turned his chair away from him, as though he was going to look out of window into the paddock, and said, "Stop a moment, Samuel."

The convict faced round at once. He could see nothing but the back of George's head, and George seemed to be sitting in profound repose, staring at the green trees, and the parrots which were whistling and chattering among the boughs. Burton's snake-like eyes gleamed with curiosity.

"You watched me to-day in the Post-office," said George.

"Yes, sir; but I did not think you saw me."

"No more I did. I felt you," answered George. "By the bye, you got fourteen years for the Stanlake business, did you not?"

"Yes, sir; fourteen weary years," said Burton, looking inquiringly at the back of George's head, and madly wishing that he could see his face.

"Only just out now, is it?" said George.

"I was free in eight, sir. Then I got two. I should have got life over this last bank robbery, but that I turned Queen's evidence."

"I hope you will mend your ways," said George, repeating, unconsciously, Mr. Oxton's words to the same man on a former occasion. "By George, Samuel, why don't you?"

"I am going to, sir," replied Burton, hurriedly; and still he stood, without moving a muscle, staring at

the back of George Hillyar's head so eagerly that he never drew his breath, and his red-brown face lost its redness in his anxiety.

At last George spoke, and he smiled as though he knew what was coming.

"Samuel," he said, "I believe your wife died; did she not?"

"Yes, sir, she died."

"How did she die?"

"Cold. Caught in Court; hung on her lungs."

"I don't mean that. I mean, what was her frame of mind — there, go away, for God's sake; there will be some infernal scandal or another if we stay much longer. Here! Guard! See this man out. I tell you I won't act on such information. Go along with you. Unless you can put your information together better than that, you may tell your story to the marines on board the *Pelorus*. Go away."

Samuel Burton put on the expression of a man who was humbly assured that his conclusions were right, and only required time to prove it. It was an easy matter for those facile, practised features to twist themselves into any expression in one instant. There is no actor like an old convict. He sneaked across the yard with this expression on his face, until he came to the gate, at which stood five troopers, watching him as he passed.

He couldn't stand it. The devil was too strong in him. Here were five of these accursed bloodhounds, all in blue and silver lace, standing looking at him contemptuously, and twisting their moustaches: five policemen — men who had never had the pluck to do a dishonest action in their lives — sanding and sneer-

ing at *him*, who knew the whole great art and business of crime at his fingers' ends. It was intolerable. He drew himself up, and began on them. It was as if a little Yankee *Monitor*, steaming past our fleet of great ironclad frigates, should suddenly, spitefully, and hopelessly open fire on it.

I can see the group now. The five big, burly, honest, young men, standing silently and contemptuously looking at Samuel, in the bright sunlight; and the convict sidling past them, rubbing his hands, with a look of burlesqued politeness in his face.

"And *good* day, my noble captains," he began, with a sidelong bow, his head on one side like a cockatoo's, and his eye turned up looking nowhere. "*Good* day my veterans, my champions. My bonny, pad-clinking,* out-after-eight-o'clock-parade, George Street bucks. *Good* day. Does any of you know aught of one trooper Evans, lately quartered at Cape Wilberforce?"

"Ah!" said the youngest of the men, a mere lad; "why, he's my brother."

"No," said Samuel who was perfectly aware of the fact. "Well, well! It seems as if I was always to be the bearer of bad news somehow."

"What d'ye mean, old man?" said the young fellow, turning pale. "There's nothing the matter with Bill, is there?"

Samuel merely shook his head slowly. His enjoyment of that look of concern, which he had brought upon the five honest faces, was more intense than anything *we* can understand.

"Come: cheer up, Tom," said the oldest of the

* Alluding to the clinking of their spurs.

troopers to the youngest. "Speak out, old man; don't you see our comrade's in distress?"

"I should like to have broke it to him by degrees," said Samuel; "but it must all come out. Bear up, I tell you. Take it like a man. Your brother's been took; and bail's refused."

"That's a lie," said Tom, who was no other than George Hillyar's orderly. "If you tell me that Bill has been up to anything, I tell you it's a lie."

"He was caught," said Samuel, steadily, "boning of his lieutenant's pomatum to ile his moustachers. Two Blacks and a Chineese seen him a-doing on it, and when he was took his 'ands was greasy. Bail was refused in consequence of a previous conviction against him, for robbing a blind widder woman of a Bible and a old possum rug while she was attending her husband's funeral. The clerk of the bench has got him a-digging in his potato-garden, now at this present moment, waiting for the sessions. Good-bye, my beauties. Keep out of the sun, and don't spile your complexions. Good-bye."

CHAPTER XX.

James Burton's Story: Reuben entertains Mysterious and Unsatisfactory Company.

I WAS doubtful, at this time, whether or no Sir George Hillyar knew or guessed that we were relations of Samuel Burton, the man who had robbed him. I think even now that he did not *know*; if he did, it was evident that he generously meant to ignore it. Mr. Compton, who had recommended Samuel, told

us to say nothing about it; and we said nothing. Emma surprised Joe and me one night, when we were alone together, by firing up on the subject, and saying distinctly and decidedly that she thought we were all wrong in not telling him. I was rather inclined to agree with her; but what was to be done? It was not for us to decide.

The relations between the two families were becoming very intimate indeed. Sir George Hillyar had taken a most extraordinary fancy for Reuben, which he showed by bullying him in a petulant way the whole day long; and by continually giving him boots and clothes as peace-offerings. Reuben would take everything said to him with the most unfailing good humour, and would stand quietly and patiently, hat in hand, before Sir George, and rub his cheek, or scratch his head, or chew a piece of stick, while the "jobation" was going on. He took to Sir George Hillyar amazingly. He would follow him about like a dog, and try to anticipate his wishes in every way. He did not seem to be in the least afraid of him, but would even grin in the middle of one of Sir George's most furious tirades. They were a strange couple; so utterly different in character; Sir George so furiously obstinate, and Reuben so singularly weak and yielding; and yet they had a singular attraction for one another.

"Erne," Sir George would roar out of window, "where the devil is that tiresome monkey of a water-man?"

"I haven't seen him to-day," Erne would reply. "He has been missing since last night. The servants think he has drowned himself, after the rowing you

gave him yesterday. *I think that he has merely run away. If you like, I will order the drags.*"

"Don't you be a jackanapes. Find him."

Reuben would be produced before the window.

"May I take the liberty of asking how you have been employing your time, sir? The boats are not cleaned."

"Cleaned 'em by nine this morning, sir."

"You have not fetched home that punt-pole, sir, as you were expressly ordered."

"Fetched it home last night, sir."

"And why was it not fetched home before, sir?"

"The old cove as had the mending on it," Reuben would answer, going off at score in his old way, "has fell out with his missis, and she hid his shoes in the timber-yard, and went off to Hampton fair in a van, along with Mrs. Scuttle, the master-sweep's lady; and he had to lie in bed till she come back, which wasn't soon, for she is fond of society and calculated to adorn it; and, when she come, she couldn't remember where the shoes was put to, and so —"

"What do you mean, sir?" Sir George would interrupt, "by raking up all this wretched blackguardism before my son Erne?"

Reuben would say, that he had been asked, and supposed that he did right in answering, and by degrees the storm would blow over, and Reuben would in some way find himself the better for it. When Erne told me that he had seen his father sit on a bench and watch Reuben at his work for an hour together, I began to think that Sir George had a shrewd guess as to who Reuben was; and also to have a fancy that there might be two sides to Samuel Burton's story; and

that it was dimly possible that Sir George might wish to atone for some wrong which he had done to our cousin. But I said nothing to any one, and you will see whether or no I was right by-and-by.

However, Reuben's success with Sir George was quite notorious in our little circle. My mother said that it was as clear as mud that Sir George intended to underswear his personalities in Reuben's favour. I might have wondered what she meant, but I had given up wondering what my mother meant, years ago, as a bad job.

I saw Reuben very often during his stay at Stanlake, and he was always the very Reuben of old times — reckless, merry, saucy, and independent — ready to do the first thing proposed, without any question or hesitation. The dark cloud which had come over him the night I went up and slept with him in the ghost-room, had apparently passed away. Twice I alluded to it, but was only answered by a mad string of Cockney balderdash, like his answers to Sir George Hillyar, one of which I have given above as a specimen. The third time I alluded to the subject, he was beginning to laugh again, but I stopped him.

"Rube," I said, looking into his face, "I don't want *you* to talk about that night. I want you to remember what I said that night. I said, Rube, that, come what would, I would stick by you. Remember that."

"I'll remember, old Jim," he said, trying to laugh it off. But I saw that I had brought the cloud into his face again, and I bided my time. When the boating was over, the Hillyars went back into the great house at Stanlake, and Reuben came home and took

up his quarters once more in the ghost-room, at the top of the house; and then I saw that the cloud was on his face again, and that it grew darker day by day.

I noticed the expression of poor Reuben's face, the more, perhaps, because there was something so *pitiabile* in it — a look of abject, expectant terror. I felt humiliated whenever I looked at Reuben. I wondered to myself whether, under any circumstances, *my* face could assume that expression. I hoped not. His weak, handsome face got an expression of eager, terrified listening, most painful to witness. Mr. Faulkner had lent Joe "Tom and Jerry," and among other pictures in it, was one of an effeminate, middle-aged forger, just preparing for the gallows, by George Cruikshank; and, when I saw that most terrible picture, I was obliged to confess that Reuben might have sat for it.

A very few nights after his return, just when I had satisfied myself of all the above-mentioned facts about Reuben, it so happened that Fred, being started for a run in his night-shirt, the last thing before going to bed, had incontinently run into the back kitchen, climbed on to the sink to see his brothers, Harry and Frank, pumping the kettle full for the next morning, slipped up on the soap, come down on one end, and wetted himself. My mother was in favour of airing a fresh night-gown, but Emma undertook to dry him in less time; so they all went to bed, leaving Fred standing patiently at Emma's knees, with his back towards the fire, in a cloud of ascending steam.

I had caught her eye for one instant, and I saw that it said, "Stay with me." So I came and sat down beside her.

"Jim," she said eagerly, "you have noticed Reuben: I have seen you watching him."

"What is it, sweetheart?" I answered. "Can you make anything of it?"

"Nothing," she said. "I am fairly puzzled. Has he confided to you?"

I told her faithfully what had passed between us the night I stayed in his room.

"He has done nothing wrong; that is evident," she said. "I am glad of that. I love Reuben, Jim. I wouldn't have any evil happen to Reuben for anything in the world. Let us watch him and save him; let us watch him and save him."

I promised that I would do so, and I did. I had not long to watch. In three days from that conversation, the look of frightened expectation in Reuben's face was gone, and in its place there was one of surly defiance. I saw that what he had expected had come to pass. But what was *that*? I could not conceive. I could only remember my promise to him, to stick by him, and wait till he chose to tell me. For there was that in his eyes which told me that I *must* wait his time; that I must do anything but ask.

He left off coming in to see us of an evening, but would only look in to say "Good night," and then we would hear him toiling up the big stairs all alone. Two or three times Emma would waylay him and try to tempt him to talk, but he would turn away. Once she told me he laid his head down on the banisters and covered his face; she thought he was going to speak, but he raised it again almost directly, and went away hurriedly.

The house was very nearly empty just now. The

lodgers, who had, so to speak, flocked to my father's standard at first, had found the house dull, and had one by one left us, to go back into the old houses, as buildings which were not so commodious, but not so intolerably melancholy. The house was not so bad in summer; but, when the November winds began to stalk about the empty rooms, like ghosts, and bang the shutters, in the dead of night — or when the house was filled from top to bottom with the November fog, so that, when you stood in the middle of the great room at night with a candle, the walls were invisible, and you found yourself, as it were, out of sight of land; then it became a severe trial to any one's nerves to live above stairs. They dropped off one by one; even the Agars and the Holmeses, our oldest friends. They plainly told us why; we could not blame them, and we told them so.

It used to appear to me so dreadfully desolate for Reuben, sleeping alone up there at the very top of the house, separated from everything human and lifelike by four melancholy storeys of empty ghost-haunted rooms. I thought of it in bed, and it prevented my sleeping. I knew that some trouble was hanging over his head, and I thought that there was something infinitely sad and pathetic in the fact of that one weak, affectionate soul lying aloft there, so far away from all of us, brooding in solitude. Alone in the desolate darkness, with trouble — nay, perhaps with guilt.

One night I lay awake so long thinking of this, that I felt that my judgment was getting slightly unhinged — that, in short, I was wandering on the subject. I awoke Joe. He had never been taken into full confidence about Reuben and his troubles. Reuben

was a little afraid of him, and had asked me not to speak to him on the subject, but I had long thought that we were foolish in not having the advice of the soundest head in the house; so, finding my own judgment going, I awoke him and told him everything.

"I have been watching too," said Joe, "and I saw that he had asked you and Emma to say nothing to me. Mind you never let him know you have. I'll tell you what to do, old man. What time is it?"

It was half-past eleven, by my watch.

"Get up and put on some clothes; go up stairs and offer to sleep with him."

"So late," I said. "Won't he be angry?"

"Never mind that. He oughtn't to be left alone brooding there. He'll — he'll — take to drink or something. Go up now, old man, and see if he will let you sleep with him."

It was the cold that made my teeth chatter. I feel quite sure that it was not the terror of facing those endless broad stairs in the middle of a November night, but chatter they did. I had made my determination, however; I was determined that I would go up to poor Reuben, and so I partly dressed myself. Joe partly dressed himself too, saying that he would wait for me.

Oh, that horrible journey aloft, past the long corridors, and the miserable bare empty rooms, up the vast empty staircases, out of which things looked at me, and walked away again with audible footsteps! Bah! it makes me shudder to think of it now.

But, at last, after innumerable terrors, I reached Reuben's room-door, and knocked. He was snoring very loud indeed — a new trick of his. After I had

knocked twice, he suddenly half-opened the door, and looked out before I had heard him approach it. It was dark, and we could not see one another. Reuben whispered, "Who's there?" and I answered,

"It's only me, Rube. I thought you were so lonely, and I came up to sleep with you."

He said, "That's like you. Don't come in, old fellow; the floor's damp: let me come down and sleep with you instead. Wait."

I waited while Reuben found his trousers, and all the while he kept snoring with a vigour and regularity highly creditable. At last, after a few moments indeed, I made the singularly shrewd guess that there was some one else sleeping in Reuben's room — some one who lay on his back, and the passages of whose nose were very much contracted.

Reuben came down stairs with me in the dark. He said it was so kind of me to think of him. He confided to me that he had a "cove" upstairs, a great pigeon-fancier, to whom he, Reuben, owed money; but which pigeon-fancier was in hiding, in consequence of a mistake about some turbits, into which it would be tedious to go. I *thought* it was something of that kind, and was delighted to find that I was right. I took occasion to give Rube about three-halfpennyworth of good advice about low company, but he cut it short; for he rolled sleepily into our room, where a light was burning, and tumbled into my bed with one of his old laughs, and seemed to go to sleep instantly.

I was glad of this, for I was in mortal fear lest he should notice one fact: Joe was not in the room, and Joe's bed was empty. Joe had been following me to see me through my adventure, as he always did; but,

if Reuben had seen that Joe had been watching us, I know he would never have forgiven him, and so it was just as well as it was. I put the light out, and in a few minutes I heard Joe come into the room and get into bed. Although I was very tired after a hard day's work, I determined to think out the problem of Reuben's visitor. I had scarcely made this determination, when it became clear to me that he was no other than Robinson Crusoe, who had come to insist that all Childs' and Chancellor's omnibus-horses were to be roughed in three minutes, in consequence of the frost. I then proceeded down the Thames in a barge, by the Croydon atmospheric railway; and then I gave it up as a bad job, and went on the excursion which we all, I hope, go at night. May yours be a pleasant one to-night, my dear reader — pleasanter than any which Reuben's friend, the pigeon-fancier, is at all likely to make.

CHAPTER XXI.

Gerty goes on the War-Trail.

BELOW the city of Palmerston, which was situated just at the head of the tideway, the river Sturt found its way to the sea in long reaches, which were walled in, to the very water's edge, by what is called in the colony teascrub — a shrub not very unlike the tamarisk, growing dense and thick, about fifteen feet high, on the muddy bank, eaten out by the wash of many steamboats. But, above the tideway, the river was very different. If you went up, you had scarcely passed the wharfs of the city before you found yourself in a piece of real primæval forest, of nearly two thousand acres, left by

James Oxton from the very first; which comprised a public park, a botanic garden, and the paddock of the police-station. This domain sloped gently down to the river on either side, and the river was no sooner relieved from the flat tideway than it began to run in swift long shallows of crystal water, under hanging woodlands — in short, to become useless, romantic, and extremely beautiful.

Passing upward beyond the Government Reserve, as this beautiful tract was called, you came into the magnificent grounds of the Governor's House. The house itself, a long, white, castellated building, hung aloft on the side of a hill overhead, and was backed by vast green sheets of woodland. From the windows the lawn stooped suddenly down, a steep slope into the river, here running in a broad deep reach, hugging the rather lofty hills, on the lower range of which the house was situated.

Immediately beyond the Government House, and on the other side of the river, was a house of a very different character. The river, keeping, as I said, close to the hills, left on the other side a great level meadow, which, in consequence of the windings of the stream, was a mere low peninsula, some five hundred acres in extent, round which it swept in a great still, deep circle. At the isthmus of the peninsula, on a rib of the higher ground behind, a ridge of land ran down, and, forming the isthmus itself, was lost at once in the broad river-flat below: there stood the residence of our friend the Hon. James Oxton.

It was a typical house — the house of a wealthy man who had not always been wealthy, but who had never been vulgar and pretentious. It was a perfectly honest

house; it *meant* something. It meant this: that James Oxtan required a bigger house now that he was worth a quarter of a million than he did when he was merely the cadet of an English family, sent here to sink or swim with the only two thousand pounds he was ever likely to see without work. And yet that house showed you at a glance that the owner did not consider himself to have risen in the social world one single step. He had always been a gentleman, said the house, and he never can be more or less. Ironmongers from Bass Street might build magnificent Italian villas, as an outward and visible proof that they had made their fortunes, and had become gentlemen beyond denial or question. James Oxtan still lived comfortably between weather-board and under shingle, just as in the old times when ninety-nine hundredths of the colony was a howling wilderness; *he* could not rise or fall.

Yet his house, in its peculiar way, was a very fine one indeed. Strangers in the colony used to mistake it for a great barracks, or a great tan-yard, or something of that sort. Fifteen years before he had erected a simple wooden house of weather-board, with a high-pitched shingle roof. As he had grown, so had his house grown. As he had more visitors, he required more bed-rooms; as he kept more horses, he required more stables, consequently more shingle and weather-boards: and so now his house consisted of three large gravelled quadrangles, surrounded by one-storied buildings, with high-pitched roofs and very deep verandahs. There was hardly a window in the whole building; nothing but glass doors opening to the ground, which were open for five or six months in the year.

An English lady might have objected to this arrange-

ment. She might have said that it was not convenient to come in and find a tame kangaroo, as big as a small donkey, lying on his side on the hearthrug, pensively tickling his stomach with his fore paws; or for six or eight dogs, large and small, to come in from an expedition, and, finding the kangaroo in possession of the best place, dispose themselves as comfortably as circumstances would allow on ottomans and sofas, until they rose up with one accord and burst furiously out, barking madly, on the most trivial alarm, or even on none at all. An English lady, I say, might have objected to this sort of thing, but Aggy Oxtan never dreamt of it. Mrs. Quickly objected to it, both on the mother's account and on that of the blessed child, not to mention her own; but Mrs. Oxtan never did. It was James's house, and they were James's dogs. It must be right.

I mentioned Mrs. Quickly just this moment. I was forced to do so. The fact of the matter is, that at this time — that is to say, on the very day on which George Hillyar had his interview with Samuel Burton in his office — the whole of these vast premises, with their inhabitants, were under her absolute dominion, with the exception of the dogs, who smelt her contemptuously, wondering what she wanted there; and the cockatoo, who had delivered himself over as a prey to seven screaming devils, and, having bit Mrs. Quickly, had been removed to the stables, rebellious and defiant.

For there was a baby now. James Oxtan had an heir for his honours and his wealth. The shrewd Secretary, the hard-bitten man of the world, the man who rather prided himself at being thoroughly con-

versant with all the springs of men's actions, had had a new lesson these last few days. There was a sensation under his broad white waistcoat now, so very, very different from anything he had ever felt before, and so strangely pleasant. He tried to think what it was most like. It was nearest akin to anxiety, he thought. He told his wife that he felt it in the same place, but that it was very different. After all, he did not know, on second thoughts, that it *was* so very like anxiety. He thought, perhaps, that the yearning regret for some old friend, who had died in England without bidding him goodbye, was most like this wonderful new sensation of child-love.

But, whatever it was most like, there it was. All the interlacing circles of politics, ambition, business, and family anxiety had joined their lines into one; and here, the centre of it all, lay his boy, his first-born, heir to 150,000 acres, on his pale wife's knee.

He was an anxious man that day. The party which was afterwards to rise and sweep him away for a time, the party of the farmers and shopkeepers, recruited by a few radical merchants and some squatters, smarting under the provisions of James Oxtan's Scab Act, and officered, as the ultra-party in a colony always is, by Irishmen — the party represented in the House by Mr. Phelim O'Ryan, and in the press by the Mohawk — had shown their strength for the first time that day; and, as a proof of their patriotism, had thrown out, on the third reading (not having been able to whip in before), the Government district-building-surveyor's-bill, the object of which was to provide that the town should be built with some pretensions to regularity, and that every man should get his fair money's

worth out of the bricklayer. It was thrown out, wholesome and honest as it was, as a first taste of the tender mercies and good sense of a party growing stronger day by day. James Oxton had cause to be anxious; he saw nothing before him but factious opposition, ever growing stronger to every measure he proposed; no business to be comfortably done until they, the Mohawks, were strong enough to take office, which would be a long while. And when they were — Oh heavens! Phelim O’Ryan, and Dempsey the ex-rebel! It wouldn’t do to think of.

And George Hillyar? About this proposition of his going to England? The Secretary was strongly of opinion that he ought to go, and to make it up with his father, and to set things right, and to give Gerty her proper position in the world; but George wouldn’t go. He was obstinate about it. He said that his father hated him, and that it was no use. “He is a short-necked man,” argued James Oxton to himself, “and is past sixty. He may go off any moment; and there is nothing to prevent his leaving three-quarters of his property to this cub Erne — the which thing I have a strong suspicion he has done already. In which case George and Gerty will be left out in the cold, as the Yankees say. Which will be the deuce and all: for George has strong capabilities of going to the bad left in him still. I wish George would take his pretty little wife over to England, and make his court with the old man while there is time. But he won’t, confound him!”

The poor Secretary, you see, had cause enough for anxiety. And, when he was in one of what his wife chose to call his Sadducee humours, he would have

told you that anxiety was merely a gnawing sensation behind the third button of your waistcoat, counting from the bottom. When, however, he came into the drawing-room, and saw his boy on his wife's lap, and Gerty kneeling before her, the sensation, though still behind the same little button, was not that of anxiety, but the other something spoken of above.

The baby had been doing prodigies. He was informed of it in a burst of excited talk. It had wimmicked. Not once or twice, but three times had that child wimmicked at its aunt as she knelt there on that identical floor under your feet. Mrs. Oxton was confirmed in this statement by Gerty, and Gerty by Mrs. Quickly. There was no doubt about it. If the child went on at this pace, it would be taking notice in less than a month!

This was better than politics — far better. Confound O'Ryan and all the rest of them. He said, there and then, that he had a good mind to throw politics overboard and manage his property. "Will you have the goodness to tell me, Gerty," he said, "what prevents my doing so? Am I not poorer in office? Is it not unendurable that I, for merely patriotically giving up my time and talents to the colony, am to be abused by an Irish adventurer; have my name coupled with Lord Castlereagh's (the fool *meant* to be offensive, little dreaming that I admire Lord Castlereagh profoundly); and be unfavourably compared to Judas Iscariot? I'll pitch the whole thing overboard, take old George into partnership, and let them ruin the colony their own way. Why shouldn't I?"

Gerty didn't know. She never knew anything. She thought it would be rather nice. Mrs. Oxton remarked

quietly, that three days before he had been furiously abusing the upper classes in America, as cowardly and unprincipled, for their desertion of politics, and their retirement into private life.

"There, *you* are at it now," said the Secretary. "How often have I told you not to *réchauffer* my opinions in that way, and bring them up unexpectedly. You are a disagreeable woman, and I am very sorry I ever married you."

"You should have married Lesbia Burke, my love," said Mrs. Oxton. "We always thought you would. Didn't we, Gerty?"

"No, dear, I think not," said simple Gerty; "I think you forget. Don't you remember that poor mamma always used to insist so positively that Mary was to marry Charley Morton; and that you were to marry James; and that I was to marry either Dean Maberly, or Lord George Staunton, unless some one else turned up? I am sure I am right, because I remember how cross she was at your walking with Charley Morton at the Nicnicabarla picnic. She said, if you remember, that you were both wicked and foolish — wicked, to spoil your eldest sister's game, and more foolish than words could say, if you attempted to play fast and loose with James. I remember how frightened I was at her. 'If you think James Oxton is to be played the fool with, you little stupid,' she said —"

"The girl is mad," said Mrs. Oxton, blushing and laughing at the same time. "She has gone out of her mind. Her memory has completely gone."

"Dear me!" said Gerty, looking foolishly round; "I suppose I oughtn't to have told all that before

James. I am terribly silly sometimes. But, Lord bless you, it won't make any difference to him."

Not much, judging from the radiant smile on his face. He was intensely delighted. He snapped his fingers in his wife's face. "So Charley Morton was the other string to her bow, hey? Oh Lord!" he said, and then burst into a shout of merry laughter. Mrs. Oxton would not be put down. She said that it was every word of it true, and that, idiot as Charley Morton was, he would never have snapped his fingers in his wife's face. Gerty couldn't understand the fun. She thought they were in earnest, and that she was the cause of it all. Mrs. Oxton saw this, and pointed it out to the Secretary. He would have laughed at her anxiety, but he saw she was really distressed; so he told her, in his kind, quiet way, that there was such love and confidence between him and her sister, as even the last day of all, when the secrets of all hearts should be known, could not disturb for one instant.

She was, possibly, a little frightened by the solemnity with which he said this, for she stood a time without answering; and Mr. Oxton and his wife, comparing notes that evening, agreed that her beauty grew more wonderful day by day.

For a moment she stood, with every curve in her body seeming to droop the one below the other, and her face vacant and puzzled; but suddenly, with hardly any outward motion, the curves seemed to shift upwards, her figure grew slightly more rigid, her head was turned slightly aside, her lips parted, and her face flushed and became animated.

"I hear him," she said; "I hear his horse's feet

brushing through the fern. He is coming, James and Aggy. I know what a pity it is I am so silly —¹"

"My darling —" broke out Mrs. Oxton.

"I know what I mean, sister dear. He should have had a cleverer wife than me. Do you think I am so silly as not to see that? Here he is."

She ran out to meet him. "By George, Aggy," said the Secretary, kissing his wife, "if that fellow *does* turn Turk to her —"

He had no time to say more, for George and Gerty were in the room, and the Secretary saw that George's face was haggard and anxious, and began to grow anxious too.

"I am glad we are all here together alone," said George. "I want an important family talk. Mrs. Quickly, would you mind going?"

Mrs. Quickly had, unnoticed, heard all that had passed before, and seemed inclined to hear more. She minced, and ambled, and bridled, and said something about the blessed child; whereupon Mrs. Oxton, like a shrewd body, gave her the baby to take away with her, reflecting that if she tried to listen at the keyhole the baby would probably make them aware of the fact.

"I look pale and anxious, I know," said George. "I am going to tell you why. Has Gerty told you what she told me last week?"

Yes, she had.

"I have been thinking over the matter all day, all day," said George, wearily, "and I have come to the conclusion that that circumstance makes an immense difference. Don't you see how, Oxton?"

"I think I do," said the Secretary.

George looked wearily and composedly at him, and

said, "I mean this, my dear Oxton; I steadily refused to pay court to my father before, partly because I thought it useless, and partly because my pride forbade me. This news of Gerty's alters everything. For the sake of my child, I must eat my pride, and try to resume my place at the head of the house. Therefore, I think I will accede to your proposal, and go to England."

"My good George," said Mrs. Oxton, taking him by both hands, "my wise, kind George, we are so sure it will be for the best."

"My boy," said the Secretary, "you are right. I cannot tell you how delighted I am at your decision. I wish I was going. Oh heavens! if I could only go. And you will go, and actually see old Leecroft, and Gerty shall take a kiss to my mother. Hey, Gerty? She would know you if she met you in the street, from my description? Shall you be in time to get off by the *Windsor*?"

"Oh Lord, no," said George, speaking fast for an instant; "we couldn't possibly go by that ship. No; we could not be ready by then."

"I suppose you couldn't," said the Secretary. "I was thinking for a moment, George, that you were as impatient as I should be."

"Hardly that," said George. "My errand home is a different sort of one from yours."

So George got leave of absence, and went home; partly to see whether or no he could, now a family was in prospect, get on some better terms with his father; and partly because, since he had the interview with Samuel Burton, everything seemed to have grown duller and blanker to him. His first idea was to put sixteen

thousand miles of salt water between him and this man. and his purpose grew stronger every time he remembered the disgraceful tie that bound them together.

So they went. As the ship began to move through the green water of the bay, Gerty stood weeping on the quarter-deck, clinging to George's arm. The shore began to fade rapidly; the happy, happy shore, on which she had spent her sunny, silly life. The last thing she saw through her tears was the Secretary, standing at the end of the pier, waving his hat, and Aggy beside him. When she looked up again, some time after, the old familiar shore was but a dim blue cloud, and, with a sudden chill of terror, she found herself separated from all who knew her and loved her, save one — alone, on the vast, heaving, pitiless ocean, with George Hillyar.

For one instant, she forgot herself. She clutched his arm and cried out, "George, George! let us go back. I am frightened, George. I want to go back to Aggy and James. Take me back to James! Oh, for God's sake, take me back!"

"It is too late now, Gerty," said George coldly. "You and I are launched in the world together alone, to sink or swim. The evening gets chill. Go to your cabin."

The Secretary stamped his foot on the pier, and said, "God deal with him as he deals with her!" But his wife caught his hands in hers, and said, "James, James! don't say that. Who are we that we should make imprecations? Say, God help them both, James."

CHAPTER XXII.

James Burton's Story; Very Low Company.

REUBEN'S friend, the pigeon-fancier, never showed in public. I asked Reuben, after a day or two, whether he was there still, and Reuben answered that he was there still, off and on. I was very sorry to hear it, though I could hardly have told any one why.

Reuben never came in of a night now; at least, never came to sit with us. Sometimes he would come in for a few minutes, with his pockets always full of bull's-eyes and rock and such things, and would give them to the children, looking steadily at Emma all the while, and then go away again. He would not let me come up to his room. He seemed not at all anxious to conceal the fact, that there was some one who came there who was, to put it elegantly, an ineligible acquaintance. My father became acquainted with the fact, and was seriously angry about it. But Reuben had correctly calculated on my father's good nature and disinclination to act. Reuben knew that my father would only growl; he knew he would never turn him out.

Very early in my story I hinted that Alsatia was just round the corner from Brown's Row. Such was the fact. In Danvers Street and Lawrence Street, west and east of us, might be found some very queer people indeed; and, as I have an objection to give their names, I shall give them fictitious ones. I have nothing whatever to say against Mrs. Quickly, or of the reasons which led to her emigration. She hardly comes into

question just now, for she emigrated to Cooksland not long after Fred was born. I repeat that I personally have nothing to say against Mrs. Quickly; she was always singularly civil to me. That she was a foolish and weak woman, I always thought, but I was surprised at the singular repugnance which Emma showed towards her. And Mrs. Broodhen again. What could have made *her* fly out at the poor woman in that way, and fairly hunt her out of Sydney? And will you tell me why, in the end, not only Emma and Mrs. Broodhen, but also my mother, had far more tenderness and compassion for that terrible unsexed termagant Mrs. Bardolph (*née* Tearsheet), than for the gentle, civil, soft-spoken Mrs. Quickly? I asked my wife why it was the other day, and she told me that nothing was more difficult to answer than a thoroughly stupid question.

At the time of which I am speaking *now*, Mrs. Quickly had gone to Australia, and the house she had kept in Lawrence Street was kept by Mrs. Bardolph and Miss Ophelia Flanagan. Miss Flanagan was a tall raw-boned Irish woman, married to a Mr. Malone. Mrs. Bardolph was a great red-faced coarse Kentish woman, with an upper lip longer than her nose, and a chin as big as both, as strong as a man, and as fierce as a tiger.

This winter she had returned from a short incarceration. There had been a fatal accident in her establishment. Nobody — neither the dozen or fourteen gentlewomen, nor Nym, nor Bardolph, nor Pistol — had anything to do with it. The man had fallen downstairs and broken his neck accidentally; but neither the Middlesex Magistrates nor the Assistant-Judge could conceal from themselves the fact, that Mrs. Bardolph

kept a disorderly house; and so she had to go to Holloway. She had now returned, louder, redder, and angrier than before.

Not many days after the night on which I had gone up into Reuben's room, I had some business in Cheyne Row, and when it was done I came whistling and sauntering homewards. As I came into Lawrence Street, I was thinking how pleasant and fresh the air came up from the river, when I was attracted by the sound of people talking loudly before me, and, looking up, I saw at the corner of the passage which leads by the Dissenting chapel into Church Street, this group —

Miss Flanagan and Mrs. Bardolph, leaning against the railings with their arms folded; Mr. Nym, Mr. Bardolph, and Mr. Pistol (I know who I mean well enough); a dozen or fourteen gentlewomen, Bill Sykes, Mrs. Gamp, Moll Flanders, and my cousin Reuben. There was a man also, who leant against a post with his back towards me, whose face I could not see.

As I came near them, they stopped talking, every one of them, and looked at me. To any lad of eighteen, not born in London, or one of the chief towns in Australia, this would have been confusing; to *me* it was a matter of profound indifference. I was passing them with a calm stare, by no means expressive of curiosity, when Mrs. Bardolph spoke:

“Hallo, young Bellus-and-tongs! What's up?”

I replied to her, not in many words. There was a roar of laughter from the whole gang; she looked a little angry for a moment, but laughed good-naturedly directly afterwards. Then I was sorry for what I had said. But you had to keep your tongue handy in those times, I assure you.

"Never you mind the stirabout, you monkey," she said; "my constitution wanted reducing; I was making a deal too much flesh. Take your cousin home and mind him, you cheeky gonoff; don't you see that the devil has come for him?"

There was another laugh at this, and I turned and looked at the gentleman who was leaning against the corner-post, and who was laughing as loud as any one. I was not impressed in this gentleman's favour; but I was strongly impressed with the idea that this was the gentleman who had snored so loud one night he had slept in Reuben's room. But I only laughed too. I said to Mrs. Bardolph, that Rube knew his home and his friends a good deal better than she could tell him, and so I went on my way, and, as I went, heard Miss Flanagan remark that I was a tonguey young divvle, but had something the look of my sisther about the eye.

I was glad that Erne came to see me that night, for I was terribly vexed and ill at ease at finding Reuben in such company — in company so utterly depraved that I have chosen, as you see, to designate them by Shakespearian names. It was not because I wished to confide in him that I was glad to see him. I had no intention of doing that. If I had, in the first place I should have been betraying Reuben; in the second, I should have been ashamed; and in the third, I should have been telling the difficulty to a person as little likely to understand it and assist one out of it as any one I know. Erne's childish simplicity in all worldly matters was a strange thing to see.

No. It was for this reason I was glad to see Erne. I was vexed, and the fact of his sitting beside me

soothed me and made me forget my vexation. Why? you ask. Well, that I cannot tell you. I have not the very least idea in the world why. I only know that when Erne was sitting with me I had a feeling of contentment which I never had at other times. We never spoke much to one another; hardly ever, unless we were alone, and then only a few words; nothing in themselves, but showing that we understood one another thoroughly. Erne's powers of conversation were entirely reserved for Emma and Joe. But they told me that if I was out when he came, he was quite distraught and absent; that he would never talk his best unless I was present — though he would, perhaps, only notice my coming by taking my hand and saying, "How do, old fellow?" A curious fact these boy-friendships! A wise schoolmaster told me the other day that he should not know what to do without them, and that he had to utilize them. They are, I think, all very well until Ferdinand meets Miranda. After that, they must take their chance. At this time, it was only child Erne who was in love with child Emma. As yet I was the centre round which Erne's world revolved. I had not gone to the wall as yet.

"Hallo!" said Erne, when he burst in. "I say, is Jim here? I say, old fellow, want to talk to you most particularly. Where's Emma, old fellow? Fetch Emma for me; I want to have a talk about something very particular indeed. A regular council of war, Joe. You Hammersmith, you needn't say anything; you listen, and reserve your opinion. Do you hear?"

I remember that he shook hands with me, and I remember smiling to see his white delicate fingers clasped in my own black hand. Then Emma came

sweeping in, and her broad noble face shaped itself into one great smile to welcome him; and he asked her to give him a kiss, and she gave him one, and you must make the best of it you can, or the worst that you dare. And then she passed on to her place by the fire with Frank and Harry, and Fred hanging to her skirts, and sat down to listen.

The court was opened by Erne. He said, "My elder brother is come home." There were expressions of surprise from Joe and Emma.

"Yes," said Erne. "He is come home. Emma, I want to ask you this: If you had a brother you had never seen, do you think you could care for him?"

Emma said, "Yes. That she should certainly love him, merely from being her brother."

"But suppose," said Erne, "that you had never heard anything but evil about him. Should you care for him then?"

"Yes," said Emma; "I wouldn't believe the evil. And so I should be able to love him."

"But," said Erne, "that is silly nonsense. Suppose that you were *forced* to believe everything bad against him?"

"I wouldn't without proof," said resolute Emma.

"But suppose you *had* proof, you very obstinate and wrong-headed girl. Supposing the proofs of his ill-behaviour were perfectly conclusive. Suppose that."

"Supposing that," said the undaunted Emma, "it is supposing a good deal. Suppose that I was to suppose that you had taken the whole character of your brother from second-hand, and had never taken the

trouble or had the opportunity to find out the truth. Suppose that."

"Well," said Erne, after a pause, "that is the case, after all. But you needn't be so aggravating and determined; I only asked your opinion. I wanted you to —"

"To hound you on till you joined the faction against your brother, eh?" said Emma. "Now, you may be offended or not; you may get up and leave this room to-night; but you shall hear the truth. Joe and I have talked over this ever since you told us that your brother was expected a fortnight ago, and I am expressing Joe's opinion and my own. Every prejudice you take towards that man lowers you in the estimation of those who love you best. You sit there, I see, like a true gentleman, without anger; you encourage me to go on to the end and risk the loss of your acquaintance by doing so (it is Joe who is speaking, not I); but I tell you boldly, that your duty, as a gentleman, is to labour night and day to bring your brother once more into your father's favour. It will ruin you, in a pecuniary point of view, to do so; but, if you wish to be a man of honour and a gentleman, if you wish to be with us all the same Erne Hillyar that we have learnt to love so dearly, you must do so."

"I have two things more to say," continued Emma, whose colour, heightened during her speech, was now fading again. "Jim here knew nothing whatever of this speech I have made you. It was composed by Joe, and I agree with every word, every letter of it; and that is all I have to say, Erne Hillyar."

CHAPTER XXIII.

James Burton's Story : the Hillyars and the Burtons among the Tombs.

My brother Joe had at one time made a distinct request to my father that he should learn the trade, in which he was backed up by my mother, for the rather inscrutable reason that any trade was better than cooeping. It was a perfectly undeniable proposition, but was somewhat uncalled for, because the question with Joe was not between smithwork and cooperwork, but between hand-work and head-work — whether he should become an artizan or a scholar.

It was that busybody Emma that persuaded him in the end, of course: by quietly depreciating me, and by flattering Joe's intellect. During the time that the matter was in debate, she assumed a pensive air, and used to heave little sighs when she looked at Joe, and was so misguided once as to dust a chair I had been sitting in. After this I was taken with a sudden affection for her, and, having made my face seven times dirtier than usual, had embraced her tenderly. I also put a cinder in her tea, which brought matters to a crisis, for we both burst out laughing; and I called her a stuck-up humbug, which thing she acknowledged with graceful humility, and before I had time to turn round, had made me promise to add my persuasion to hers, and persuade Joe to become a scholar.

I did so, and turned the scale. Joe continued at school, first as pupil, and secondly as an underteacher,

until he was eighteen, at which time it became apparent to Mr. Faulkner that Joe was giving promise of becoming a very first-rate man indeed.

He expressed this opinion to Mr. Compton, who called upon him one day for the purpose of asking him his opinion of Joe. A very few days after Mr. Compton came to my father, and said that Sir George Hillyar begged to take the liberty of advising that Mr. Joseph Burton should remain where he was a short time longer; after which Sir George "would have great pleasure in undertaking to provide employment for those extraordinary talents which he appeared to be developing."

"Well," said Joe, with a radiant face; "if this ain't — I mean is not — the most ex-tra-awdinary, I ever."

I said that *I* never didn't, neither.

My father whistled, and looked seriously and inquiringly at Mr. Compton.

"*I* don't know why," answered Mr. Compton, just as if my father had spoken. "Erne's ———, I mean," continued he, with a stammer, at which Miss Emma got as red as fire, "I mean Erne's friend's brother there, Reuben's cousin — Law bless you! fifty ways of accounting for it. But, as for knowing anything, I don't, and what is more, old Morton the keeper don't know, and, when he don't know, why, you know, who is to?"

"Certainly, sir," said my father. "So Morton he don't know nothink, don't he? Well! well!"

However, this was very good news indeed. We should have Joe with us for some time longer, and the expectation of the first loss to the family circle

was lying somewhat heavy on our hearts. And then, when he did leave us, it would be with such splendid prospects. My mother said it would not in the least surprise her to see Joe in a draper's shop of his own — which idea was scornfully scouted by the rest of us, who had already made him prime minister. In the meantime I was very anxious to see Erne and thank him, and to know why Miss Emma should have blushed in that way.

Erne evidently wanted to see me for some purpose also, for he wrote to me to ask me to meet him at the old place the next Sunday afternoon.

The "old place" was a bench which stood in front of Sir Thomas More's monument, close to the altar rails of the old church. We promised that we would all come and meet him there.

It is so long ago since we began to go to the old church, on Sunday afternoon in winter, and in the evening in summer, that I cannot attempt to fix the date. It had grown to be a habit when I was very, very young, for I remember that "church" with me, used at one time to mean the old church, and that I used to consider the attendance on the new St. Luke's, in Robert Street, more as a dissipation, than an act of devotion.

My mother tells me that she used first to take me there about so and so — meaning a period when I was only about fourteen months old. My mother is a little too particular in her dates, and her chronology is mainly based on a system of rapidly-recurring eras: a system which, I notice, is apt to spread confusion and dismay among the ladies of the highly genteel rank to which we have elevated ourselves. However, to leave

mere fractions of time, of no real importance, to take care of themselves, she must have taken me to the old church almost as soon as my retina began to carry images to my brain, for I can remember Lord and Lady Dacre, with their dogs at their feet, before I can remember being told by Mrs. Quickly, that the doctor had been for a walk round the parsley bed, and had brought me a little brother from among the gooseberry bushes: which was her metaphorical way of announcing the fact of my brother Joe's birth.

At first, I remember, that I used to think that all the statues were of the nature of Guy Fawkes', and were set up there to atone for the sins committed in the flesh. From this heretical, nay, pagan frame of mind I was rescued by learning to read; and then I found that these images and monuments were not set up for warning, but for example. I began to discover that these people who had died, and had their monuments set up here, were, by very long odds, the best people who ever lived. I was, for a time, puzzled about those who had their epitaphs written in Latin, I confess. Starting on the basis, that every word in every epitaph was strictly true, I soon argued myself into the conclusion that the Latin epitaphs were written in that language for the sake of sparing the feelings of the survivors; and that they were the epitaphs of people about whom there was something queer, or, at all events, something better reserved for the decision of the Scholastic few who understood Latin. At a very early age I became possessed with the idea that when Mrs. Quickly died it would become necessary, for the sake of public morality, to write her epitaph in Latin. I can't tell you how I came to think so. I never for

a moment doubted that such an excellent and amiable woman would have a very large tomb erected to her by a grateful country; but I never for a moment doubted that it would become necessary to have a Latin inscription on it.

But conceive how I was astonished by finding, when I was a great fellow, that the Latin inscriptions were quite as complimentary as the English. Joe translated a lot of them for me. It was quite evident that such people as the Chelsea people never lived. So far from Latin being used with a view of hiding any little *faux pas* of the eminent deceased from the knowledge of the ten-pound householders, it appeared that the older language had been used, merely because the miserable bastard *patois*, which Shakespeare was forced to use, but which Johnson very properly rejected with decision, was utterly unfit to express the various virtues of these wonderful Chelsea people, of whom, with few exceptions, no one ever heard. It used to strike me, however, that, among the known or the unknown, Sir Thomas More was the most obstinately determined that posterity should hear his own account of himself.

My opinion always was, that the monuments which were in the best taste, were those of the Hillyars and of the Duchess of Northumberland. There are no inscriptions on these, with the exception of the family names. The members of the family are merely represented kneeling one behind the other with their names — in the one case above their heads, in the other, on a brass beneath. The Dacres, with their dogs at their feet, are grand; but, on the whole, give me the Hillyars, kneeling humbly, with nothing to say for themselves. Let the Dacres carry their pride and their

dogs to the grave with them if they see fit; let them take their braches, and lie down to wait for judgment. Honest John Hillyar will have no dogs, having troubles enough beside. He and his family prefer to kneel, with folded hands, until the last trump sound from the East, or until Chelsea Church crumble into dust.

I always loved that monument better than any in Chelsea Old Church. 'Tis a good example of a mural monument of that time, they say; but they have never seen it on a wild autumn afternoon, when the sun streams in on it from the south-west, lights it up for an instant, and then sends one long ray quivering up the wall to the roof, and dies. What do they know about the monument at such a time as that? Still less do they know of the fancies that a shock-headed, stupid blacksmith's boy — two of whose brothers were poets, and whose rant he used to hear — used to build up in his dull brain about it, as he sat year after year before it, until the kneeling figures became friends to him.

For I made friends of them in a way. They were friends of another world. I found out enough to know that they were the images of a gentleman and his family who had lived in our big house in Church Street three hundred years ago; and, sitting by habit in the same place, Sunday after Sunday, they became to me real and actual persons, who were as familiar to me as our neighbours, and yet who were dead and gone to heaven or hell three hundred years before — people who had twenty years' experience of the next world to show, where I had one to show of this present life; people who had solved the great difficulty, and who could tell me all about it, if they would only turn their

heads and speak. Yes, these Hillyars became real people to me, and I, in a sort of way, loved them.

I gave them names in my own head. I loved two of them. On the female side I loved the little wee child, for whom there was very small room, and who was crowded against the pillar, kneeling on the skirts of the last of her big sisters. And I loved the big lad who knelt directly behind his father; between the knight himself, and the two little brothers, dressed so very like blue-coat boys, such quaint little fellows as they were.

I do not think that either Joe or Emma ever cared much about this tomb or its effigies. Though we three sat there together so very often for several winters, I do not think it ever took their attention very much; and I, being a silent lad, never gave loose to my fancies about that family monument, even to them. I used to find, in the burst of conversation which always follows the release of young folks from church, that we all three, like most young people, had not attended to the sermon at all; but that our idle fancies, on those wild winter afternoons, had rambled away in strangely different directions. I always used to sit between the two others, upright, with my head nearly against the little shield which carries the date, "Anno, 1539." Soon after the sermon had begun I used to find that Joe's great head was heavy on one shoulder, while Emma had laid her cheek quietly against the other, and had stolen her hand into mine. And so we three would sit, in a pyramidal group, of which I was the centre, dreaming.

I used to find that Joe would be building fancies of the dead who lay around us, of what they had done,

and of what they might have done, had God allowed them to foresee the consequences of their actions; but that Emma had been listening to the rush of the winter wind among the tombs outside, and the lapping of the winter tide upon the shore — thinking of those who were tossed far away upon stormy seas, only less pitiless than the iron coast on which they burst in their cruel fury.

I cannot tell how often, or how long, we three sat there. But I know that the monument had a new interest to me after I made Erne Hillyar's acquaintance, and began to realize that the kneeling figures there were his ancestors. I tried then to make Erne the living, take his place, in my fancy, among the images of his dead forefathers and uncles; but it was a failure. He would not come in at all. So then I began trying to make out which of them he was most like; but he wasn't a bit like any one of them. They none of them would look round at you with their heads a little on one side, and their great blue-black eyes wide open, and their lips half-parted, as though to wait for what you were going to say. These ancestors of his were but brass after all, and knelt one behind the other looking at the backs of one another's heads. Erne would not fit in among them by any means.

But one day, one autumn afternoon, as I sat with Emma on one side, and Joe on the other, with my back to Sir Thomas More's tomb and my face to Sir John Hillyar's, thinking of these things; I got a chance of comparing the living with the dead. For, when the sermon was half way through, I heard the little door, which opens straight from the windy wharf into the quiet chancel, opened stealthily; and, looking round, I

saw that Erne had come in, and was sending those big eyes of his ranging all over the church to look for something which was close by all the time. I saw him stand close to me, for a minute, moving his noble head from side to side as he peered about him, like an emu who has wandered into a stockyard; but, as soon as he had swept the horizon, and had brought his eyes to range near home, he saw me. And then he smiled, and I knew that he had come to find us.

And after service we walked out together. And the sexton let us into that quiet piece of the churchyard which overlooks the river, and we stood there long into the twilight, talking together as we leant against the low wall. Erne stood upon the grave of the poor Hillyar girl who had died in our house, as his habit was, talking to me and looking at Emma. The time went so quick that it was dark before we got home; but we all discovered that it was a very capital way of having a talk together, and so, without any arrangement at all, we found ourselves there again very often. Once Emma and I went along with Frank; but Frank, having eaten a dinner for six, went to sleep, and not only went to sleep but had the nightmare, in a manner scandalously audible to the whole congregation, in the first lesson. Emma had to take him out, and, when I came out at the end of the service, I found that Erne and Emma were together by the river-wall, and no one else but Frank. He had seen her coming out, and had stayed with her for company. It was very kind of him, and I told him so. He called me an old fool.

The Sunday afternoon on which we were to meet Erne was a wild and gusty one, the wind sweeping drearily along the shore, and booming and rushing

among the railings around the tombs. My sister and I went alone, and sat on the old bench: but no Erne made his appearance, and soon I had ceased to think much of him.

For there came in and sat opposite to me — directly under the Hillyar monument — the most beautiful lady I had ever seen. She was very young, with a wonderfully delicate complexion, and looked so very fragile, that I found myself wondering what she did abroad in such wild weather. She was dressed in light grey silk, which gave her a somewhat ghostly air; and she looked slightly worn and anxious, though not enough so to interfere with her almost preternatural beauty. When I say that I had never seen such a beautiful woman as she was, I at once find that I can go farther, and say, that I have never since seen any one as beautiful as she, by a long interval. My wife was singularly handsome at one time.* Mrs. Oxton, when I first saw her, was certainly beautiful. Lady Hainault, my namesake, as I reminded her once, was, and is, glorious; but they none of them could ever have compared, for an instant, with that young lady in grey silk, who came and sat on the bench, under the Hillyar monument, opposite my sister and me, on that wild autumn afternoon.

She came in by the little side door which opens from the chancel on to the river. She sat down on the bench opposite me, beside a poor cracked old sempstress, whose devotions were disturbed every five minutes by her having to put down her prayer-book and hunt spiders; and old Smith the blind man, who used to say his responses in a surly, defiant tone of voice, as if

* The Hon. Mrs. Burton presents her compliments to the Editor, and begs to inform him that this is the first she ever heard of it.

every response was another item in a bill against heaven, which had already run too long, and ought to have been paid long ago.

But she sat down in this fantastic company, and seemed glad to rest. Mrs. Smith, the pew-opener, the blind man's wife, caught sight of a strange sail in the offing, bore down, and would have brought her into a pew. But the strange lady said that she was tired, and would sit where she was.

There was a gentleman with her, by-the-bye. A tall gentleman, very pale, rather anxious-looking, without any hair on his face. He asked her, wasn't she afraid of the draught? And she said, "No. Please, please dear, let me sit here. I want rest, dear. Do let me sit here." And when she said this two ideas came into my head. The first was that the beautiful lady was, for some reason, afraid of the pale, anxious gentleman; and the second was that they were Americans, because — although they both spoke perfectly good English, yet they seemed to have no hesitation about speaking out loud in church; which they most decidedly did, and which, as I am informed now, the Americans, as a general rule, do not.

No Erne made his appearance. Emma and I sat on our accustomed bench, with the beautiful, weary lady opposite. The wind rattled at the old casements, and when the sermon began a storm of sleet came driving along from the westward, and made the atmosphere freezing cold. The strange beautiful lady seemed to cower under it, to draw herself together and to draw her shawl closer and closer around her, with a look almost of terror on her face. The poor lunatic woman, who sat beside her, put up her umbrella. The

pew-opener saw her, and came up and fought her for it, with a view to making her put it down again. The cracked woman was very resolute, and Mrs. Smith was (as I think) unnecessarily violent, and between them they drove one of the points of the umbrella into Smith's eye; which, as Smith was blind already, didn't matter much, but which caused him a deal of pain, and ended in shovings and recriminations between Mrs. Smith and the cracked woman. And the beautiful lady, in the middle of it all, finding no rest anywhere, came across wearily and feebly and sat beside Emma. She did not faint or make any scene; but when I looked round soon after I saw her head on Emma's shoulder, and Emma's arm round her waist. She was very poorly, but the pale gentleman did not see it.

After service she took his arm, and while the people were crowding out of church I kept near them. I heard her say —

"I cannot stay to look at the monument to-day, dear; I am very tired."

"Well," said the gentleman, "the carriage won't be long. I told them to meet us here."

She stood actually cowering in the cold blast which swept off the river round the corner of the church. She crouched shuddering close to the pale man, and said —

"What a dreadful country, love. Is it always like this in England? I shall die here I am afraid, and never see Aggy any more, and poor James will be so sorry. But I am quite brave and resolute, George. I would not change my lot with any woman," she continued rather more hastily; "only there is no sun here, and it is so very dark and ugly."

I was glad to hear him speak kindly to her and soothe her, for I could not help fancying that she would have been glad of a gentler companion. But I had little time to think of this, for Erne, coming quickly out of the open gate of the churchyard, came up to them and said —

“Mr. George Hillyar, I think?”

George Hillyar bowed politely, and said, “Yes.”

“We ought to know one another,” said Erne, laughing; “in fact, I am your brother Erne.”

I did not like the look of George Hillyar’s face at all; he had an ugly scowl handy for any one who might require it, I could see. But Erne was attracted suddenly by his sister-in-law’s beauty, and so he never saw it; by the time he looked into his brother’s face again the scowl had passed away, and there was a look of pleased admiration instead. Poor Mrs. Hillyar seemed to brighten up at the sight of Erne. They stood talking together affectionately for a few minutes, and then the George Hillyars drove away, and left Erne and me standing together in the churchyard.

“What a handsome *distingué*-looking fellow,” said Erne. “I know I shall like him.”

I hoped their liking might be mutual, but had strong doubts on the point.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Homeward Bound.

SECRETARY OXTON was a wise and clever fellow, but he was liable to err, like the rest of us. Secretary Oxtton was an affectionate, good-hearted, honourable man, a gentleman at all points, save one. He was clever and ambitious, and in the grand fight he had fought against the world, in the steady pluckily-fought battle, the object of which was to place him, a younger son, in a position equal to that of his elder brother, to found a new and wealthy branch of the Oxtton family, he had contracted a certain fault, from which his elder brother, probably from the absence of temptation, was free.

He had seen that wealth was the key to that position. He had seen early in the struggle, that a fool with wealth was often of more influence than a wise man without it. And so he had won wealth as a means to the end of power. But the gold had left a little of its dross upon him, and now he was apt to overvalue it.

Acting on this error, he had put before him, as a great end, with regard to George and Gerty Hillyar, that George should go to England and win back his father's favour. His wife, good and clever as she was, was only, after all, a mirror to reflect her husband's stronger will; consequently there was no one to warn him of the folly he was committing, when he urged George so strongly to go to England — no one to tell him of the danger of allowing such a wild fierce hawk as George to get out of the range of his own influence;

of the terrible peril he incurred on behalf of his beloved Gerty, by sending him far away from the gentle home atmosphere, which had begun to do its work upon him so very well, and throwing him headlong among his old temptations, with no better guide than a silly little fairy of a wife.

He could not see all this in his blindness. He did calculate on the amount of good which had been wrought in George's character by his wife's gentle influence and his own manly counsel. He was blinded by the money question. He did not see that it would be better for Gerty's sake, and for all their sakes, to keep Sir George Hillyar near him with two thousand a year, a busy, happy man, than to have him living in England without control, amongst all his old temptations. He could not bear the idea of that odd eight or nine thousand a year going out of the family. He had worked at money-getting so long that that consideration outweighed, nay, obscured every other.

And so he encouraged George to go to England. And, when the last grand forest cape was passed, and they were rushing on towards Cape Horn before the west wind, and the dear peaceful old land had died away on the horizon, and was as something which had never been; and when Gerty got penitent, and sea-sick, and tearful, and frightened, and yellow in the face, and everything but cross — then all the good influences of James and Agnes Oxton were needed, but they were not at hand; and such mischief was done as would have made the Secretary curse his own folly if he could have seen it. And there was no one to stay the course of this mischief, but tearful silly sea-sick Gerty.

Poor little child of the sun! Poor little bush prin-

cess! brought up without a thought or a care on the warm hill-side at Neville's Gap, in the quiet house which stood half-way up the mountain, with a thousand feet of feathering woodland behind, and fifty miles of forest and plain before and below. Brought up in a quiet luxurious home, among birds and flowers and pet dogs; a poor little body, the cares in whose life were the arrivals of the pianoforte-tuner on his broken-kneed grey, supposed to be five hundred years old; who had never met with but two adventures in her life before marriage, the first of which (a very terrible one, which we shall speak of in its place) she could barely remember; and the second when James and Aggy carried her off in a steamer to Sydney, and Aggy chaperoned her to the great ball at Government House; and she had wondered why the people stared at her so when she walked up the room following in Aggy's wake, as she sailed stately on before her towards the Presence, until she was told next morning that James had won 500 *l.* on her beauty: for that Lady Gipps had pronounced her to be more beautiful than young Mrs. Buckley *née* Brentwood, of Garoopna, in Gippsland.

But here was a change. This low sweeping grey sky, and the wild heaving cold grey sea: and then the horrible cliffs of bitter floating ice, at whose base the hungry sea leaped and slid up, gnawing caverns and crannies; yet pitifully smoothing away, with their ceaseless wash, a glacié, to which the finger of no drowning man might hope to clutch that he might prolong his misery. The sun seemed gone for ever, and as they made each degree of Southing, Gerty got more shivering and more tearful, and seemed to shrink more and more into her wrappers and cloaks.

But all this had a very different effect on Mrs. Nalder. On that magnificent American woman it had a bracing effect; it put new roses into her face, and made her stand firmer on her marine continuations — had I been speaking about an English duchess I should have said her sea legs. She wasn't sick, not she; but Nalder was, and so it fell to George's lot to squire Mrs. Nalder, an employment he found to be so charming that he devoted himself to it. Mrs. Nalder got very fond of George, and told her husband so; whereupon Mr. Nalder replied that he was uncommon glad she had found some one to gallivant her round, for that he was darned if he rose out of that under forty south. And, when forty south came, and Gerty made her appearance on deck with Mrs. Nalder, she found that dreadful Yankee woman calling George about here and there, as if he belonged to her. Gerty got instantly jealous, although Mrs. Nalder was kind and gentle to her, and would have been a sister to her. Gerty repulsed her. Mrs. Nalder wondered why. The idea of anybody being sufficiently insane to be jealous of her never entered into her honest head. She asked her husband, who didn't know, but said that Ostrellyan gells were, as a jennle rule, whimsical young cusses.

No. Gerty would have nothing to do with the kind-hearted American woman, for she was bitterly jealous of her. And Mr. Nalder frightened her, that honest tradesman, with his way of prefacing half his remarks by saying "Je-hoshaphat," which scared her out of her wits, for she thought he was going to say something worse. His way of thwacking down his right or left bower at Eucre, his calling the trump card the Deck-head, his way of eating with his knife, and his reckless

noisy *bonhomme*, were all alike, I am sorry to say, disgusting to her; nothing he could do was right; and, after all, Nalder was a good fellow. George got angry with her about her treatment of these people, and scolded her; and he could not scold by halves; he terrified her so that he saw he must never do it again. He put a strong restraint on himself; to do the man justice, he did that; and was as tender and gentle with her as he could be for a time. But his features had been too much accustomed to reflect violent passion to make it possible for him to act his part at all times. Her dull fearful submission irritated him, and there came times when that irritation, unexpressed in words and actions, would show itself too faithfully in his face; and so that look of pitiable terror which had come into Gerty's great eyes the first time he had sworn at her; that restless shifting of the pupil from side to side, accompanied by a spasmodic quivering of the eyelids, never, never wholly passed away any more. "That he could have cursed her! That he could have snarled at her, and cursed her! It was too horrible. Could James have been right? And Neville's Gap so many thousand miles away, and getting further with every bound of the ship!"

George saw all this, and it made him mad. He found out now that he had got a great deal fonder of beautiful Mrs. Nalder than he had any right to be; and after a week's penitential attention to Gerty, he went over to Mrs. Nalder, and begun the *petit soin* business with her once more. But, unluckily for him, Mrs. Nalder had found him out. George, poor fool, thought that the American woman's coolness towards him arose from jealousy at his having returned to Gerty. He

found his mistake. The brave Illinois woman met him with a storm of indignation, and rated him about his treatment of his wife. She had no tact, or she would not have done so, for she only made matters worse.

Of all the foolish things which James Oxtan ever did, this was the worst: sending these two out of the range of his own and his wife's influence.

Gerty revived a little in the tropics. The sun warmed her into something like her old self. But all Mrs. Nalder's kindness failed to win her over. She suspected her and was jealous of her; and, besides, the great handsome woman of the Western prairies was offensive to the poor little robin of a creature. She *was* coarse and loud, and her hands were large, and she was so *strong*. She couldn't even make Gerty comfortable on a bench without hurting her. And, besides, Gerty could see through all this affected attention which she showed her. Gerty, like most silly women, thought herself vastly clever. Mrs. Nalder was a most artful and dangerous woman. All this assumed affection might blind her poor husband, but could never blind her.

But the good ship rolled and blundered on, until it grew to be forty north, instead of forty south, and the sunny belt was passed once more, and Gerty began to pine and droop again. George would land at Dover; and he landed in a steamer which came alongside. And the last of the old ship was this — that all the crew and the passengers stood round looking at her. And Mrs. Nalder came up and kissed her, and said, very quietly, "My dear, we may never meet again, but, when we do, you will know me better than you do now." Then Gerty broke into tears, and asked Mrs. Nalder to

forgive her, and Mrs. Nalder, that coarse and vulgar person, called her a darling little sunbeam, and wept too, after the Chicago style (and when they do things at Chicago, mind you, they do 'em with a will). Then Gerty was on the deck of the little steamer, and, while she was wondering through her tears why the sides of the ship looked so very high, there came from the deck a sound like a number of glass bells ringing together and ceasing at once; then the sound came again, louder and clearer; and as it came the third time, George raised her arm, and said — "Wave your handkerchief, Gerty; quick, don't you hear them cheering you?"

And, directly afterwards, they stood on the slippery, slimy boards of the pier at Dover, on the dull English winter day; and she looked round at the chalk cliffs, whose crests were shrouded in mist, and at the muddy street, and the dark coloured houses, and she said, "Oh, dear, dear me. Is this, this England, George? What a nasty, cold, ugly, dirty place it is."

CHAPTER XXV.

Gerty's First Innings.

A VERY few days before Sir George Hillyar received the note which told him of his son's arrival in England, he happened to be out shooting alone, and his keeper saw that he was very anxious and absent, and shot very badly indeed. He conceived that it was Sir George's anxiety about his son's arrival, and thought little about it; but, as the day went on, it became evident that Sir George wanted to broach some subject, and had a hesitation in doing so.

At last he said — "What state are the boats in, Morton?"

"They are in very good repair, Sir George."

"I think I shall have them painted."

"They were painted last week, Sir George."

"I shall get new oars for them, I fancy."

"The new oars, which you ordered while staying at Kew, came home last Thursday, Sir George."

"H'm. Hey. Then there is no work for a waterman about the lake, is there?"

"None whatever, Sir George."

"Morton, you are a fool. If I had not more tact than you I would hang myself before I went to bed."

"Yes, Sir George."

"Send for the young waterman that we had at Kew, and find him some work about the boats for a few days."

"Yes, Sir George."

"You know whom I mean?"

"No, Sir George."

"Then why the devil did you say you did?"

"I did not, Sir George."

"Then you contradict me?"

"I hope I know my place better, Sir George. But I never did say I knew who you mean, for I don't; in consequence I couldn't have said I did. Maark! caawk! Awd drat this jawing in cover, Sir George! Do hold your tongue till we're out on the heth agin. How often am I to tell you on it?"

At the next pause in the sport old Morton said, "Now, Sir George, what do you want done?"

"I want that young man, Reuben Burton, whom we had at Kew, fetched over. I want you to make an

excuse for his coming to mend the boats. That's what I want."

"Then why couldn't you have said so at once?" said old Morton to his face.

"Because I didn't choose. If you get so impudent, Morton, I shall be seriously angry with you."

"Ah! I'll chance all that," said Morton to himself; "you're easy enough managed by those as knows you. I wonder why he has taken such a fancy to this young scamp. I wonder if he knows he is Sam Burton's son. I suspect he do."

But old Morton said nothing more, and Reuben was sent for to Stanlake.

Sir George was going out shooting again when Reuben came. The old butler told him that the young waterman was come, and Sir George told him that he must wait; but, when Sir George came out, he had got a smile on his face ready to meet the merry young rascal who had amused him so much.

"Hallo! you fellow," he began, laughing; but he stopped suddenly, for the moment he looked at Reuben Burton he saw that there was a great change in him. Reuben had lost all his old vivacity, and had a painfully worn, eager look on his face.

"Why, how the lad is changed!" said Sir George. "You have been falling in love, you young monkey. Go and see to those boats, and put them in order."

Reuben went wearily to work; there was really nothing to do. Sir George merely had him over to gratify a fancy for seeing him again. It may have been that he was disappointed in finding the merry slangy lad he had got to like, looking so old and anxious, or it may have been that his nervous anxiety for the ap-

proaching interview with his son put Reuben out of his head; but, however it was, Sir George never went near Reuben after the first time he had looked at him, and had seen the change in him. No one will ever know now what was working in Sir George's heart towards Reuben Burton. The absence of all inquiries on his part as to who Reuben was, decidedly favours James Burton the elder's notion, that Sir George guessed he was the son of Samuel Burton, and that he did not, having conceived a strange affection for the lad, wish to push his inquiries too far. Was it this? Or was it merely an old man's fancy? But even now, when he seemed to have passed the lad by himself, he made Erne go and see him every morning.

"Erne," he said, "that boy is in trouble. In secret trouble. Find his secret out, my child, and let us help him."

But kind and gentle Erne couldn't do that. Reuben went as far as telling him that he was in trouble; but also told him that he could say nothing more, for the sake of others.

"I say, old Rube," said Erne, as he sat lolling against the side of a boat which Reuben was mending, "I have found out the whole of the business from beginning to end."

"Have you, sir?" said Reuben with a ghost of a smile. "I am glad of it."

"You have been getting into bad company," said Erne.

"Very bad," said Reuben.

"And you are innocent yourself?"

"Yes," said Reuben. "Come. I couldn't say as much to every one, Master Erne; but I know, when I

say a thing to you, that it won't go any further. Therefore I confide this to your honour, for if you betray me I am lost. I *am* innocent."

Erne laughed. "That is something like your old familiar nonsense, Reuben. Tell me all about it."

"It would be awkward for you if I did, sir."

"Well! well!" said Erne. "I believe in *you*, anyway. I say, does Emma know about it?"

"God bless you, no," said Reuben. "Don't tell her nothing, for God's sake, Master Erne."

"You haven't told me anything, Reuben; so how could I tell her?"

"I mean, don't let her know that Sir George noticed how I was altered. I should like her to think the best of me to the last. If trouble comes, the bitterest part of it will be the being disgraced before her. Don't say anything to *her*."

"Why should I be likely to?" said Erne.

"Why," said Reuben, "I mean, when you and she was sitting together all alone, courting, that you might say this and that, and not put me in the best light. Lord love you, master, I know all about that courting business. When the arm is round the waist, the tongue won't keep between the teeth."

"But I am not courting Emma," said Erne. "At least —"

"At least or at most, master, you love the ground she walks on. Never mind what your opinion about your own state of mind is. Only be honourable to her. And, when the great smash comes, keep them in mind of me."

"Keep who in mind?" said Erne.

"Jim and Emma. Help 'em to remember me. I

should be glad to think that you three thought of me while I was there."

"While you are where?" said Erne, in a very low voice.

"In Coldbath Fields, master," said Reuben. "Now YOU'VE got it."

One need not say that Erne was distressed by the way in which Reuben spoke of himself. He was very sorry for Reuben, and was prepared to do anything for him; but —

He was eighteen, and Reuben had accused him of his first love. Poor Reuben, by a few wild words, had let a flood of light in on to this boy's heart. Reuben was the first who had told him that he was in love. One has, in chemistry, seen a glass jar full of crystal clear liquid, clear as water, yet so saturated with some salt that the touch of any clumsy hand will send the spiculæ quivering through it in every direction, and prove to the sense of sight that the salt, but half believed in before, is there in overpowering quantities. So Reuben's words crystallized Erne's love; and he denied it to himself no longer. And in this great gush of unutterable happiness poor Reuben's trouble and disgrace were only a mere incident — a tragical incident, which would be a new bond in their love.

So Erne, leaving poor Reuben tinkering at the boats, walked on air. He had determined, as he walked through the wood, that the first thing he would do would be to go off to Chelsea — to get Jim Burton, the blacksmith's eldest son (with whom you have already some acquaintance), and to tell him all about it; when, walking through the wood, he met his father.

"Have you been to see that young waterman, Erne?" said his father.

"I have," said Erne. "We ought to be kind to that fellow, dad. He is in trouble, and is innocent."

"I think he is," said Sir George. "I have a great fancy for that fellow. I know what is the matter with him."

"Do you?" said Erne. "I don't."

"Why, it's about this Eliza Burton," said Sir George, looking straight at him; "that's what is the matter."

"You don't happen to mean Emma Burton, do you?" said Erne.

"Emma or Eliza, or something of that sort," said Sir George. "He is in love with her, and she is playing the fool with some one else."

"He is not in love with her, and she has been playing the fool with nobody," said Erne.

"So you think," said Sir George; "I, however, happen to know the world, and, from the familiarities which you have confessed to me, as passing between this girl and yourself, I am of a different opinion. I have allowed you to choose what company you wished for above a year; I have been rewarded by your full confidence, and, from what you told me about this girl, I believe her to be an artful and dangerous young minx."

"Don't talk in that light way about your future daughter-in-law; I am going to marry that girl. I am eighteen, and in three years I shall marry her."

"How dare you talk such nonsense? Suppose, sir, that I was to alter — I mean, to stop your allowance, sir, hey?"

"Then the most gentlemanly plan would be to give me notice. Her father will teach me his trade."

"You are impertinent, undutiful, and what is worse, a fool —"

"And all that sort of thing," said Erne. "Having fired your broadside of five-and-forty sixty-eight pounders, perhaps you will let off your big swivel gun on deck. I tell you I am going to marry Emma Burton."

"You know, you undutiful and wicked boy, all the consequences of a *mésalliance* —"

"That's the big gun, hey?" said Erne. "Why, yes; your *mésalliance* with my mother having been dinned into my ears ever since I was five, as the happiest match ever made, I *do* know; you have put your foot in it there. A blacksmith's daughter is as good as a gamekeeper's, any day."

"Her relations, sir! Her relations!"

"My Uncle Ben, sir! My Uncle Ben!"

Old Compton the lawyer had warned Erne, on one previous occasion, against what he called "hard hitting." But Erne, as Reuben would have said, could never keep his tongue between his teeth. His Uncle Ben was a very sore subject. His Uncle Ben had not borne the rise in circumstances consequent on his sister becoming Lady Hillyar with that equanimity which is the characteristic of great minds. The instant he heard of the honour in store for him, he got drunk, and had remained so, with slight lucid intervals ever since — a period of eighteen years. Having the constitution of a horse, and the temper of his sister, he had survived hitherto, and was quoted from one doctor to another as the most remarkable instance ever known of the habitual use of stimulants. They used to give clinical lectures

on him, and at last made him uncommonly proud of his performances. Such, combined with a facility for incurring personal liabilities, which was by no means impaired by his intemperate habits, were some of the characteristics of Uncle Ben, now triumphantly thrown in Sir George's face by Erne.

He was very angry. He said that such an allusion as that, on Erne's part, revealed to him an abyss of moral squalor beneath the surface, which he was not prepared for, in the case of one so young.

"Now, mark me, sir. Once for all. I do not oppose your fancy for this girl. I encourage it. You distinctly understand that once for all. Your brother dines here to-day."

"So I hear," said Erne, seeing that it would not do to go on with any more nonsense.

"I hope sincerely that you and your brother will remain friends. I do not purpose your seeing much of him. His wife has, I hear, some claims to beauty."

"She is the sweetest little rosebud you ever saw in your life."

"Where have you seen her? I *know* you didn't go to seek them, because you promised me you would not."

"I did not, indeed. I guessed who they were from a few words they said in church, and, as I came out, I introduced myself."

"Where were you? At what church?"

"At the old church, Chelsea."

"What a singular thing. Is Compton come?"

It was with intense eagerness that Mr. Compton, knowing what he knew, watched the face of father and son, when they met after so many years estrangement.

He knew perfectly how much, how very much, each of them had to forgive the other; and he knew, moreover, that neither of them had the least intention of forgiveness. He guessed that George had come over to try to win back his father's good graces with the assistance of his wife; but he knew far too much to hope anything from her assistance. One thing he knew, which others only guessed, that Sir George Hillyar had made a will, leaving Erne eight thousand a year. This was the paper, which (if your memory will carry you back) he had exhibited such an anxiety to take to his office, but which Sir George insisted on keeping in his old *escritoire*.

He was in the library, and Sir George was out, when he heard them drive up. He knew that there was no one to receive them, and saw from that that their reception was to be formal. He did not hurry at his dressing, for he was in some small hopes that George and his wife might have a short time, were it only a minute, together alone with Sir George, and that either of them might show some gleam of affection towards the other, which might bring on a better state of things than that cold, cruel course of formality which Sir George had evidently planned.

"It will be a bad job for Erne, possibly," said the old man. "But my young friend must take his chance. I won't stand between father and son, even for him."

When he came into the drawing-room he found Erne and his father dressed and waiting. They were standing together at the very end of the third drawing-room, before the fire, and Sir George was talking to Erne about one of the horses. When he joined them,

a question was put to him on the subject; and they went on discussing it. There was not the smallest sign of anxiety or haste about Sir George's manner.

He had not been talking with Erne many minutes, when the door by which he had entered, which was at the very farthest end of the three rooms, was opened again; and Mr. and Mrs. George Hillyar came in, and began making their way through the vast archipelago of grand furniture which lay between the opposing parties. Sir George took out his watch, clicked it open, and told Erne to ring the bell and order dinner.

The three rooms were well lighted up, and, great as the distance was, old Compton saw in one instant that Mrs. George was very beautiful. And, as she came steadily and quietly towards them, dressed in a cloud of white, he saw at every step she took that she was more beautiful still — the most beautiful woman he had ever seen.

Sir George trod three steps forward, and said, "How d'ye do, George? I am glad to see you. And how do *you* do, my dear daughter-in-law? I am afraid you must find this country very cold after Australia."

Old Compton watched the father and the son as their eyes met. Neither of them moved a muscle. George *was* very *distingué*-looking; there was no doubt about that. Nay, more, he was in a way very handsome. His features had not lost their regularity, in spite of all his dissipation. "He is wonderfully true-bred," thought old Compton. "Half wild-cat like his mother, and half bull-terrier like his father. His chance ain't worth twopence. The will in the *escritoire* is the will. No new job for me."

The old man was right. There was no mistake

about George's paternity to any such close observer as old Compton, though a stranger might have thought that there was no resemblance between them — no resemblance whatever between the thickset figure, the sleek bullet-shaped grey-head, the square gladiator features, and the clear brown-red complexion of Sir George; and the slender lithe frame, the more refined face and the pale complexion of his son. In these respects there was *no* resemblance; George's physique was that of his wild, fierce gipsy-looking mother. But he had, in common with his father, a queer contemptuous trick of eye and mouth, which showed a close observer whose son he was, in a moment. Old Compton saw it in both their faces, when their eyes met. If you had told him that those eager, fierce women, through the very force of their nature, as a rule reproduced some eighty per cent. of their own characteristics in their sons; but that a quiet and gentle wife would sometimes produce an almost actual facsimile of the father; in this case the old man would have rather pooh-poohed you. But, once begin to talk to the old lawyer about the breeding of race-horses, a matter he was well up in, and he would soon have showed you that trainers and studgrooms now and then made fortunes by following, among horses, rules of breeding *practically* treated as being ridiculous among human beings.

Mrs. George Hillyar, in reply to her father-in-law, said that she *did* find it cold. That she liked getting near the fire best, for it warmed her. And then she asked Sir George whether he hadn't got a glasshouse full of flowers in full bloom, and whether he would show them to her to-morrow.

Her powers of conversation were not large evidently. George was very angry at what he was pleased to call to himself her hopeless silliness. Yet the highest tact could not have done more, for Sir George, as he took her into dinner, said,

"I am afraid you are an innocent little babe in the wood, Gertrude."

"Yes," she said, "and I am so terribly afraid of you. Don't scold me. I am not near so silly when I am not scolded."

"My poor little redbreast," said Sir George. "Who do you think would be likely to scold *you*? You may depend on it that I will not. You must trust me and get fond of me, my child. George, will you take the end of the table, if you don't mind sitting with your back to the fire. Get Mr. Hillyar a screen, Simpson. You'll be hotter than you were in Australia, George. You are sure you don't mind."

George, who didn't want for a certain unregulated sort of humour, looked at his father, and said quietly, "that he had not found himself in so comfortable a position for many a year;" which made the old man laugh not ill-humouredly.

Old Compton talked loudly to Erne and George, and raised a wall of sound before Gerty and Sir George. He was anxious for her to see what she could do; he was all for fair play. Erne saw what he wanted, and nobly assisted him, so that the other two were perfectly isolated. Gerty had some dim idea that she was to make herself agreeable to her father-in-law, and she began her little game. As thus —

"I don't think you at all odious now. I am sure,

if they all of them saw more of you, they would not call you an odious tyrant."

"I am sure they wouldn't," said Sir George, who though he might be cruel and unjust to his son, was so much of a gentleman that he was in a state of chivalrous terror lest he should lead the beautiful little idiot into committing any one. He said —

"Do you think you shall like England, my love?"

"I don't like it now," said Gerty. "I always want to be near the fire. When I get cold I cry, and that makes George cross."

"You will like it better in the summer, my love."

"I don't know whether we shall be here in the summer or not. Aggy said it would be no use for George to stay dawdling here, away from his work, if you weren't going to do something for him, or, at all events, to define his prospects. Therefore, I suppose, as soon as I am confined, and well enough to move, we shall go back again, unless you do something decided for us. George says you will see him hanged first; but I don't think that. I don't think so badly of you as I did. Are these pink cups ice-cream? I wonder whether I dare eat some. I have never seen iced cream before in my life. Perhaps I had better not; it might make me cry."

And so she went on, twittering like one of her own zebra parakeets. But, in spite of her utter simplicity, Sir George did what every one else, young or old, rich or poor, did, who came near her; that is to say, he fell in love with her.

The other three got on amazingly well. Erne was as difficult to resist in his way as Gerty in hers. They

were to go shooting on the morrow, and George, with the assistance of the other two, was refreshing his memory on the localities. They got on very well indeed, and George became quite affectionate with Erne. They had been talking about a certain larch belt, as containing game, and old Compton had said —

“Confound the game. If you will take my advice, Mr. Hillyar, you will have it down, and let the sun in.”

“Then I *am* to have Stanlake, at all events,” thought George, flushing. “There is two thousand a year any way.”

So the George Hillyars stayed at Stanlake, and Erne and George shot and hunted, and played billiards together, and Gerty sat crouched over the fire, and saw the sunny woods and crags of Neville’s Gap among the burning coals. And day by day George saw Erne petted, caressed, and consulted, while he himself was treated with a calm politeness which was infinitely exasperating. Each day he began to see more clearly that a very large portion of the property was lost to him, and every day, alas! his dislike and jealousy towards Erne grew stronger and stronger.

CHAPTER XXVI.

James Burton’s Story: James and his Sister fall out.

SIR GEORGE HILLYAR sent for Reuben to go to Stanlake and see after some waterman’s work. And I was very glad of it; for anything, I argued, which took Reuben away from the bad company with which he seemed to be so suddenly and mysteriously involved, must be for the better.

He came down, as he went, to leave the key of his room with my father. Erne had come over to see us: to see Emma, indeed; (*I began* to see that much,) and was talking with her in the window. They turned and came towards us again when Reuben came in, and so we four were together once more, for the last time for a long while.

Reuben came whistling in, nodded a good-bye to all of us, and said to Erne, "I shall see you to-morrow, sir, I daresay," and sauntered out.

"Say a kind word to him for us," said Emma; "go to him sometimes at Stanlake, and cheer him up a little. He can't reward you for any kindness, but I will answer for him that he is grateful."

Erne promised, and very shortly after Joe came clumping in, all radiant.

"Jim," he said, "Jim! Here, such a jolly lark on. I mean," he said, getting rather red, and looking at Erne, laughing, "that I anticipated considerable entertainment."

"What's up?" I asked, simply; for it was no use trying to get fine words out of *me* at that time, without considerable preparation.

"Why," he said, "they are going to have the *Harvest Home* at the Victoria to-night, with Wright and O. Smith from the Adelphi. Come on, let's go."

"Of course," I said; for we should no more have thought of missing such a dainty treat as that in those times than of losing our dinner. "But we had better go early. We had a terrible fight for a place last time, remember, and you lost all your oranges, and a cotton handkerchief worth three halfpence, and that sort of thing makes the amusement come dear."

"I say," said Erne, suddenly; "I'll tell you what; *I'll go*. I've never been to the play in my life."

Joe and I were delighted at the idea. "But," I said, "you can't come dressed like that; you'd have to fight in a minute."

"Lend me some of your clothes and a cap," said Erne. "This is the greatest lark I ever knew. What do you think, Emma; hey?"

"I was wondering what Sir George would say if he knew where you were going, and how!"

"There is no need he should," said Erne.

"I should have thought there was," she replied, quietly. "Pray don't do anything so insane."

"There can't be any harm in it," said Erne.

"I should have said," replied Emma, "that there was the very greatest harm in a young gentleman dressing himself like a blacksmith, and going to the gallery of the Victoria Theatre. I confess *I* should think so. More particularly when that young gentleman has been so generously trusted by his father to associate with people so far below him in rank. I don't know why that gentleman's father has shown such blind trust in him. It may be because he has such full and perfect confidence in him, or it may be that his great love for him has made him foolish. Whichever way it is, for that young gentleman to abuse his father's confidence so utterly as to go masquerading in a dress which he has no right to wear, in the lowest parts of the town, with two common lads, is a degree of meanness which I don't expect at all."

As she said this I saw Joe's magnificent, Byron-like head turned in anger upon her, and I saw a wild,

indignant flush rise upon his face, and go reddening up to the roots of his close, curling hair; I saw it rise, and then I saw it die away, as Joe limped towards her, and kissed her. Whether she had *seen* it, or not, it was hard to say, but she had guessed it would be there: she put her arm round his neck, and then drew his face against hers, saying,

"Ask my brother Joe, here, what he thinks."

"He thinks as you do, and so do I," said Erne, quietly. "If you were always by me I should never do wrong."

"Ask Jim what he thinks about it," said Emma, laughing. "Ask that great stupid, dear old Jim, how he would like to see his noble hero, with a greasy old cap on, sucking oranges in the gallery of the theatre in the New Cut. Look how he stands there, like a stupid old ox. But I know who is the best of us four, nevertheless."

The "stupid old ox —" that is to say, the Honourable James Burton, who is now addressing you — had thrown his leather apron over his left shoulder, and was scratching his head. I am afraid I did look very like a stupid ox. But think that, if you had taken the cobwebs out of my brain, and wound them off on a card, you would have found that I was making a feeble effort to try to think that my brother and sister were two rather heroic and noble persons. After all, I only fancy that I remember that I was trying to think that I thought so. I am no fool, but that fierce flush on Joe's face had confused and frightened me. I saw very great danger. I had not seen that look there for a long time.

Erne gave up his project, and soon went away in

the best of humours; Joe went to his school; and I was left alone with Emma.

Though I still had my apron over my shoulder, and might, for all I can remember, have still been scratching my head, still all the cobwebs in my brain were drawn out into one strong thread, stronger than silk, and I knew what to say and what to do. I turned on Emma.

"You were perfectly right," I said, "in stopping him going. You were right in every word you said to *him*; but you had no right to speak of Joe and myself as you did."

She folded her hands, sweet saint, as if in prayer, and took it all so quietly.

"It was not good to speak of your brother so," I went on, with heightened voice and an angry face. "You may speak as you please of me, but, if you speak in that way of Joe, before his face, you will raise the devil in him, and there will be mischief. You should measure your words. Let me never hear that sort of thing again."

I was right in every word I said to her. And yet I would give all my great wealth, my title, everything I have, except my wife and children, to unsay those words again. Oh, you who use hard words, however true they may be, when will you be persuaded that every hard, cold word you use is one stone on a great pyramid of useless remorse?

How did she answer me? She ran to me and nestled her noble head against my bosom, and called me her own sweet brother, and begged me not to scold her, for that she loved him, loved him, loved him. That Erne's name was written on her heart; but that

he should never, never know it on this side of the grave; for she would devote herself to Joe, and be his sister and friend to death; and that she was so sorry for what she had said.

What could I do? What I did, I suppose. Soothe her, quiet her, and tell her I had been in the wrong (which was not altogether true). That is what I did, however; and so I had said the first and last harsh word to her. It cannot be recalled, but there is some comfort in thinking that it was the first and the last.

CHAPTER XXVII.

James Burton's Story: the Ghost shows a Light for the First Time.

THE night we went to the play, it was arranged that Joe, because of his lameness, should start first; and I was to stay behind, to finish some work. It therefore happened that I found myself hurrying through the small streets beyond Westminster Bridge, alone.

I am going to relate a distressing accident, very shortly, for the simple reason that, if I had not witnessed it, I should have missed making a singular discovery and meeting with a few singular adventures.

I noticed a young man, of my own rank and age, riding a cart-horse just in front of me, and took but little notice of him; not dreaming how very important his every look would be, in a very few minutes. I remembered after, that he seemed a merry, good-humoured fellow, and was whistling. The night was frosty, and the road was slippery; his horse blundered

and stumbled, and threw him, whistling as he was, under the wheels of a passing waggon. The next moment I was carrying him on to a doorstep, quite dead; shattered beyond recognition.

I cannot tell you what a lamentable affair it was. I did what I could — I helped others, and was beginning to congratulate myself upon my self-possession, when I found that a very singular effect was produced on myself. I was giving my name and address to a policeman, when I felt something coming too quickly to be stopped, and directly after, burst into a wild tempest of tears — such a tempest that I could not stay the course of it for a time, but had to give it way, gust after gust, until they grew fainter, and died away into an occasional stormy sob. Then I went on to the theatre, thinking, poor fool as I was, that I might forget the real terrible tragedy I had just witnessed by throwing myself headlong into a sea of fantastic balderdash.

I found Joe, and, when the door was opened, we fought our way into a good place. The instant we got settled, Joe asked me what was the matter, and I told him that I had seen a fellow run over. He said, "Poor chap!" but, not having seen it happen, thought no more about it, but settled himself down to enjoy his evening.

I suppose there are some play-goers still alive who remember the "Harvest Home." It belongs to the Eocene, or at latest to the early Miocene, formation of plays — probably, to be correct, it is halfway between the "Stranger" and the "Colleen Bawn." There was a dawning of the "sensation" style in it, but nothing very tremendous. O. Smith shot the first comedy gen-

tleman stone-dead (as you were supposed to suppose, if you hadn't known better all the time) from behind a stone wall, with an air-gun; and the first lady threw herself on the corpse, and was dragged off screaming, in a snow-storm, by Mr. O. Smith, her putative papa. Whereupon, Mr. Wright came on, as a Cockney sportsman dressed like a Highlander, having lost his way, and, as far as I can remember, found the body. In the end, Mr. O. Smith was hung, or, on the principle, says Joe, of "*Nec coram populo*," was led off cursing and kicking; and Mr. Wright was married (or was going to be) to the second lady.

That was the sort of stuff that Joe and I used to laugh and cry over in those days. We had seen the play acted at the Adelphi, and were most anxious to compare the magnificent Milesian Irish pronunciation of our own Miss Brady, with the broken English of Madame Celeste. It all fell dead on me that night. Even poor old Wright, with his bare legs and his impudent chatter, could not make me laugh. The image of what I had carried up and set on the door-step, an hour before, would not leave me. That a merry, harmless lad like that should be struck down in an instant, seemed to me so lamentable and cruel. I could think of nothing else. The details would come before me so persistently — the head that *would* hang; the two low, fallen women, who kept saying, "Poor dear! poor dear lad!" and all the rest of it. The play seemed such a hideous silly mockery after what had happened that I could bear no more of it. I made some excuse to Joe, and I went out.

The squalor and noise of the street suited my mood better than the gaudy brightness of the play-house:

and the bustling reality of the crowd soothed me for a time, and made me forget the tragedy of the evening. This crowd of noisy, swarming, ill-fed, ill-taught, ill-housed poor folks was, after all, composed of my own people — of men, women, and lads of my own rank in life; of people whose language was my own, whose every want and care I was acquainted with; of the people among whom I had been bred up, and whom I had learnt to love. I was at home among them.

The other day, after spending years in a higher and purer atmosphere, I went among them again, just to see whether they were the same to me as in old times. I found that I was quite unchanged. They did not disgust me in the least. I felt, when I got among them again, that I was at home once more. I was pleased to find that I had not developed into a snob; but I was sorry to find that they distrusted me, in my good clothes, and would have none of me. Knowing them as I did, and knowing how they talked among themselves, I could see that they talked in a different language in the presence of my fine clothes and watch-chain. It is very hard for a gentleman to know them; very nearly impossible. They never speak to him quite naturally. They never speak to a gentleman without a tale in their mouths. Who should know better than I who write?*

I went into a public-house, where I heard music, and got myself some porter, and sat down on a bench among some young men, who made room for me. The musicians played some dance-music — a waltz which I now know to be one of Strauss's; but it sounded to me

* In earnest.

like the lapping of the tide upon the mud-banks, and the moaning of the wind from the river among the grave-stones in the old churchyard.

So, thought-driven, with a despondency on me for which it was difficult to account, I was compelled homewards. From street to street, all low and dull, to the bridge, where the chill, frosty wind rustled among the scaffolding of the new Houses of Parliament with ghostly sighs. And so I passed westward, through another labyrinth of squalid streets; some bright with flaming gas and swarming with noisy crowds; some dark and dull, with only a few figures here and there, some of which lurked away before the heavy tramp of the policeman.

As I passed the vast dark façade of Chelsea Hospital, the clock struck ten, and a few minutes afterwards I came on the broad desolate river, at the east end of Cheyne Walk. The frosty wind was moaning among the trees, and the desolate wild river was lapping and swirling against the heads of the barges and among the guard piles, which stood like sentries far out, stemming the ebbing tide. Of all scenes of desolation which I ever witnessed, give me the Thames at night. I hurried on again, with the strange terrified humour on me stronger than ever.

There was a ball at a large bow-windowed house, close to Don Saltero's, and I stopped to listen to the music. There were some fiddles and a piano, played evidently by skilled professional hands. Good heavens! could they play nothing but the wild waltz of Strauss's, which I had heard the Germans playing in the public-house? Why should handsome young gentlemen and beautiful girls dance to a tune which sweeps in such

strange, melancholy eddies of sound, that even now it sets me thinking of winds wandering over solitary moonless seas, which break with a far-heard moan against distant capes, in an unknown land at midnight?

A couple came from the rest and stood in the window together, behind the half-drawn curtains: and I could see them, for their heads were against the light. He was a gallant youth, with a square head; and she seemed beautiful too. He spoke eagerly to her, but she never looked towards him; he seemed to speak more eagerly yet, and tried to take her hand; but she withdrew it, and he slowly left her and went back into the room; but she remained, and I saw her pulling the flowers from her nosegay and petulantly throwing them on the carpet, while she looked out steadily across the wild sweeping river, hurrying to the sea.

So on I went again, passing swiftly through the churchyard. In a few moments after, I had turned out of Church Street into our own row. It was quite quiet. Our great house rose like a black wall in front of me; I cast my eye up it until it rested on the great dormer-window of Reuben's room — the ghost's room — and, good heavens! there was a light there.

It was gone while I looked at it; but there was no doubt about it. Either Reuben had come home, or else it was the ghost. I went in at once. My father was sitting alone in the kitchen, with his head in his hands. I looked up at a certain hook over the dresser. The key of Reuben's room was hanging there still.

My father looked up. "Jim, my old chap," he said, "I'm so glad you're come. Get my pipe, and

come and sit alongside. How did you like the theayter, old man?"

As I looked at my father, I saw that something was the matter. I had never seen the dear, noble face in sorrow before; but my love told me at once that sorrow had come. I waited for him to tell me what it was, I had perfect confidence in him. I said: (in the old style, for though I had been trying hard to talk like Joe and Erne, I had hitherto made a mess of it, and always resorted to the vernacular in emergencies, or for business purposes), "I didn't care about the play to-night. I saw a young chap run over, and that upset me for the evening. I wasn't going to spoil Joe's fun; so I came home" ("took and hooked it" in the original). "Reuben is not come back, is he?"

"No," said my father; "he ain't come back. What should he come back for? There's his key a-hanging over the dresser. I say, old man, Mr. Compton's been here."

"Has anything gone wrong about the patent?" I asked, aghast.

"Not *gone*, old man, but very likely to go, I'm afeard."

"How is that?" I asked.

"The invention was anticipated, Mr. Compton is afraid. There was a patent taken out for it before, and Mr. Compton is afraid that Marks and Cohen have bought the patentee's interest in it; in which case, my chance ain't worth a brass farden."

"And what then?" I asked.

"Why, I'm ruined, old boy, body and bones. The savings of twenty happy years gone in a day. And worse than that — nigh a couple of hundred more, as

far as I can make out. I wouldn't have cared — I wouldn't have cared," said my father, hurling his pipe fiercely into the fireplace; "I tell you, Jim, I wouldn't have cared —" he said once more, with a heave of his great chest and a sob. That was all he said, but I understood him.

I rose to the situation. One of the proudest recollections of my most prosperous and lucky career is the way I rose to the situation that unhappy night. I put my arm on his shoulder, and drew his grizzled head to me, and said:

"Wouldn't have cared — if it hadn't been for what, father?"

"I wouldn't have cared," said my father, "if the disgrace had fallen on me alone."

"Has any one been a-talking about disgrace?" I asked.

"Not yet," said my father.

"They'd better not," I answered. "Let 'em come to me and talk about disgrace. I'll disgrace 'em. And ruin — who talks of ruin? How can the best smith in England be ruined; they can't take his trade from him, can they? Let's up with everything, and go to Australey."

"What?" said my father, looking up.

"Go to Australey," said I, as bold as brass; "the country as Master Erne's brother came from. Why, a smith is a gentleman there. He's —"

"Go to bed, old chap," said my father.

"Bed or no bed," I said, "is neither the one thing nor the other. According as a chap thinks, so will he speak; that is, if he acts according, which is reason. My sentiments being asked, I gives 'em free; and there

ak; ;k;

: k; : k;

you are, and welcome, with many more, and thank you kindly; and may the Lord forgive us all our transgressions." (All this was said with defiant assertion; for I saw that, by the mere mention of the word Australia, I had brought a light in my father's face which was not there before. In my nervous eagerness to drive the nail home, I made the above little speech, which might have been intended to mean something then, but the key to which is missing now.)

"Take and go to bed, I tell you," said my father again; "you and your Australeys! I'm ashamed on you."

"Shame took and whispered in his ear," I answered, seeing I was somehow doing the right thing, and casting the Pilgrim's Progress at him, "And Old Adam and Little Faith tried to stop his going on too; whereas I speaks out, and ain't for stopping nobody."

My father, possibly concluding that the more I spoke the more I should involve myself, reiterated:

"Go to bed, I tell you, old chap; who knows but what you're talking sense? I don't say neither the one thing nor the other; all I say is, go to bed."

And so I went: to bed, and to sleep. And, after some unknown time of unconsciousness, I awoke with a ghastly horror upon me.

Joe was by my side, but I did not wake him. I was very careful not to do that, and there were one or two reasons for it.

First of all, I thought of the poor lad I had seen run over that evening — that pale face, those teeth, and those spasmodically winking eye-lids; and, while he was still in my arms, I seemed to come round the

corner once more, into the buildings, and saw the ghost's light gleam out of Reuben's window. And then Reuben was come home, and in trouble up there. And then it was Reuben who had been run over; and then Reuben had to sit up there all alone, poor lad, watching the body; but, however the phantasmagoria shifted themselves, the crowning horror of all was in the room upstairs, where I had seen the light. And in the sheer desperation of terror I rose to go there, refusing to awaken Joe, because I even then, light-headed as I was, remembered that Reuben would not have him know anything.

And so, in a state of cowardly horror at I knew not what — a state of mind which was nearly allied to the most desperate courage — I arose silently, and, in my trousers and shirt only, passed out of our room on to the great empty staircase, determined to go up all through the desolate empty house, until I found the mystery which I knew was hid aloft in the ghostly attic. I would penetrate into the mystery of that strange light, even though I died of terror.

The old staircase creaked under my weight, and the web-winged things which flutter about ceilings of these old places dashed round aloft in silent wheeling flight. The ghosts all passed on before me in a body; and I was glad of it, for I was afraid that some of them might stand politely aside in a corner to let me pass, and I don't think I could have stood that. Yet all the ghosts passed on, except a solitary one, who followed stealthily.

This following ghost was the most terrible ghost of all, for I couldn't see what it was going to be at. I thought at one time that I would stop and see whether

it would stop too; but then again, I reflected, what a terrible thing it would be if it *didn't*, but came right on.

Once in my terror I thought of crying for help, and raising the neighbourhood; but while I was thinking of it I passed a staircase-window, and saw that I was already high above the neighbours' highest chimneys, and that I might shout long enough. There was no retreat now without passing by the ghost which was following; and every step I took I felt a growing dislike to do that — without the kitchen poker.

For it was a clumsy ghost, and knew its business imperfectly. No properly educated ghost would knock a hard metallic substance against the banisters, and then use a most low and vulgar expletive immediately afterwards. I was getting wonderfully uneasy about this ghost. The kitchen-poker was such a handy little poker, but here was I and there was the poker, and so there was nothing to do but to go on.

At last I reached Reuben's room-door, and got hold of the handle. The door was unlocked; and I threw it open — and saw nothing but black darkness.

I held my breath, and *felt* that some one was there. Dreading the man who was behind me, I desperately sprang forward towards the well-known fire-place to get hold of *Reuben's* poker, if I should have the luck. Then a lanthorn was turned full blaze on my face. I sprang towards it, with the intention of getting hold of the man who held it, putting it out, getting possession of it and pounding everything human I met with black and blue; on the old cockney rule that "a solitary man is worth a dozen in the dark, because he can hit everybody, and everybody else is afraid of

hitting one another;" but, before I could reach him, I had a cloth thrown over my head, an arm round my throat, tightening every moment; and in less than a minute was completely overpowered, with my arms tied behind me, blindfolded, with a handkerchief passed through my mouth, and tied behind; having seen no one.

I felt that I was in the light, and that people were looking at me; at last some one spoke, in a very gentlemanly, refined voice I thought, and said, "Who the deuce is it?"

"It's the young smith; it's that gallows young Burton," said another voice I knew too terribly well. It was the voice of the man I have called Bill Sykes.

Another voice said, "Let us beat the dog's brains out, and cut his body into small pieces and burn it. Curse him; prying into three gentlemen's private affairs like this. Let me have his blood, Bill. Let me have hold of him."

I knew this voice well enough. It was Mr. Pistol's. I wasn't much afraid of *him*. It was Sykes I was afraid of, the man who had me by the collar; the more so, because I saw, by poor Pistol's asking to get hold of me, that he wanted to get me out of Sykes's hands and the more so still, because I knew that Pistol, in his terror of Sykes, would let *anything* happen. Therefore, when Sykes said to Pistol, "Stand back and lock the door," and when I felt his hand tighten on my collar, I began to say the Lord's Prayer as fast as ever I could.

Pistol only said, "Bill, hold hard;" but his feeble protest was drowned in the strangest sound I ever heard. The unknown man with the gentlemanly voice

broke out with a fierce, snapping, snarling objurgation, which took myself and another listener utterly by surprise.

"Sykes, you blood-thirsty, clumsy hound, drop that life-preserver or you are a dead man. It is only by the cowardly idiocy of that fellow Pistol there that you are in this thing at all, you low brute — the best thing you were ever in in your life, worth five hundred of your stupid burglaries. Leave that boy alone, you worthless dog."

I felt Sykes's hand relax, but the bully did not yield.

"You showing fight, you sneaking, long-nosed cur! Shut up, or I'll pound you into a jelly."

"Will you?" said the gentlemanly man, almost in a scream of rage. "Me! you dog. Me! with this knife in my hand. You ignorant idiot, with your clumsy cudgels. Learn the use of this, and then you'll be my equal; just as sure as you know that I'm your master. You'd better go and tickle a black snake on the nose in December, than come near me with this in my hand. Leave that lad alone. I won't have a hair of his head touched."

The bully knew the fearful advantage which the use of the knife gives, too well; he came down a little. He said only:

"What for?"

"Because I choose it. How could such as you understand if I told you why?" said the gentlemanly man, with a fiercer snarl than ever. "I am a rogue of long standing, but I have seen better things, you Sykes. I hate you and your class. Hell has begun with me in this world, with all its torment and its loathing; and

the most terrible part of my torment is, that those I loved faithfully have cast me off, and that I have to herd with such hounds as you. But I will be revenged on one, until I bring him to reason; and, while I carry a knife, I will express my loathing and scorn for such curs as you. Come hither, lad. Do you care for your cousin Reuben?"

As he said this he moved the handkerchief from my mouth, and I answered, "Yes, I cared very much for my cousin."

"We are a parcel of thieves and worse, my lad, who have got possession of the room he rents. He knows us, my boy, and has been seen in our company. If you say one word about to-night's work, your cousin Reuben will be transported as an accomplice of ours. So you see how fatal the consequences of your speaking would be. We shall be gone to-morrow, may be. You'd best say nothing, for your cousin's sake."

I said that I would not say one word.

"If you do," said Pistol, "I'll have your bingy; strike me as blind as a morepork if I don't have your bingy!" (by which speech I know, through the light of later experience, that Mr. Pistol had been transported).

"Shut up, fool," said the gentlemanly man. "Sykes, I am going to let this young 'un go."

"I'll cut his throat if he blows," said blustering Bill. "*He knows me.* He knows he'll never be safe if he does. Swear him. Do you wish you may die if you peach, you cursed young toad?"

"You clumsy fool," said the gentlemanly man; "put him on his honour, I tell you. You'll have his

monkey up directly. You're not going to say a word, for your cousin's sake; are you, Jim?"

I repeated that I would not say one single word.

"Then come outside here," said the gentlemanly man. And so he led me to the door, pulled the cloth from my eyes, shut me out on the landing, and locked the door after. When I found myself free on the landing, I am pleased to remember that the first thing I did was to offer up a short thanksgiving: that it was only the grace after meat which I repeated in my haste is no matter — the intention was the same.

Now the steed was stolen I shut the stable-door, and went down stairs with the most elaborate caution, in anticipation of another ambushade. I was a long time in reaching my bedroom. At last I reached it. One of the pleasantest moments in my life was when I slipped into bed, and heard my father and mother snoring in the next room, producing between them such a perfect imitation of a rusty mine-pump, as would have made their fortunes on the "boards."

One comfort was that Joe had not missed me. He was lying just as I left him. He had evidently been fast asleep all the time.

Had he? The moment I was comfortably settled he spoke. He said, "It was touch and go for that devil Sykes, old Jim."

"What do you mean, Joe?" I asked, in my astonishment.

"Mean!" said Joe, laughing; "why, that I was standing in the dark behind him with our bedroom poker, and if he had raised his hand six inches higher, I'd have had him down like a dead dog, and Pistol after him. He'd have gone down at once, if I hadn't

seen the knife in the other one's hand. When *he* turned up trumps, I let things be."

"Then it was *you* who followed me upstairs?"

"So it was, Jim. I've had my suspicions about that room; and, when you began to cry out in your sleep about Reuben watching corpses up there, and when you got out and went up, I followed you. I thought you were sleep-walking, and so didn't dare to wake you. I've followed you into many fights, my old boy, and I wasn't going to let you go up *there* alone."

"I think you would follow me to death, Joe."

"I think I would," he said. "They had nothing but one dark lanthorn, or I should have had to play the dickens. I wonder what they are doing there? I think they are only hiding. We must speak to Rube, poor lad. It is very hard on him. Poor faithful, affectionate fellow! I wish he had more determination; I wish he could say No. But what can he do?"

"I'll tell you what," I said. "I have a suspicion. I believe that the man who came to my assistance with his knife was the same man I saw in Lawrence Street, that I told you of, when Rube was among the whole gang."

Joe rose up in bed, and said, in accents of profound astonishment, "Why, do you mean to say you don't see how things stand?"

I said, "No; but that long-nosed fellow seemed to have some kind of influence with Rube."

"Do you mean to say," said Joe, "that you haven't made out this much: That hook-nose man is Reuben's father, our cousin, Samuel Burton, come

home from his transportation, having followed, as I strongly suspect, Mr. George Hillyar? Didn't you make *that* out?"

I was too much dumbfounded to speak.

"You old stupid, I thought you had made it all out, and would not speak even to me, Reuben having distrusted me. I have watched the man days and days, till I made it out. Don't you see how doubly it tongueties you and me, the only two who know it?"

I did see that, certainly. But at this moment my father dreamt of the devil, and had to be punched awake by my mother, lest he should pass into that fourth and dangerous state of mesmeric coma, as did the young lady spoken of by that acute scientific reasoner, Dr. G——. In which case, as every one ought to know, it would have become necessary to mesmerise some one else, nineteen to the dozen, to fetch him back again, before he got into the fifth state, which is the deuce and all. At all events, my father awoke, and accused my mother on the spot of having had the nightmare, in consequence of having taken too much vinegar with her trotters at supper: which was all she got for her pains. But, he being awake, Joe and I talked no more.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Affairs at Stanlake.

GERTY didn't like England; she couldn't possibly conceive why the people in England didn't all go and live in Australia. James wanted to get as many of them as would come, over to Cooksland free of ex-

pense, and when they came they always liked it — in the end, you would understand her to mean; for at first they felt strange, and were, Lord bless you, more particular over their rations than any corn-stalk cockatoo who might have treed his section on the burst, and come back to the shed: or than any real stringy bark hand ever thought of being. She didn't see why they should not all move over together. It wouldn't do to leave the Queen behind; but she might get to think better of it as soon as she saw how much superior Australia was to England. And so she used to twitter on to old Sir George Hillyar, never allowing for the fact that, when most confidential and affectionate with him, she was apt (as above) to ramble off into fields of utterly incomprehensible slang, and to leave his close-cropped grey hair standing on end with amazement.

Gerty didn't like Stanlake. "Not very much, papa," she would say to Sir George, taking his hand in hers; "you ain't offended, are you? because I mustn't offend you, or else James will be angry with me when I go back home, and say it is all my fault. I love you, but I don't like Stanlake. George knows you are going to leave it to him, because Mr. Compton advised him to cut down the east belt. But I don't like it. It's so cold to your bones."

"What do you like, my dear little white rosebud?" Sir George said one day, laughing.

"Why," she answered, "let me see. I like you (very much indeed — you don't know how much); and I like George more than you; and I like Erne more than you, but not so much as George. And I like Reuben the waterman, and his cousin the black-

smith, Jim — I mean, you know, Erne's friend — the tall lad with the large brown eyes, who sat under the tomb that first Sunday, when the pew-opener poked the umbrella into her husband's eye, because the mad woman caught spiders in her prayers (you didn't hear of that, though). I like him, and I like his great big sister; for, although her hands are very red, she has a gentle face, and her voice is like James's when he is playing with baby. I like all these; so I can't be so hard to please as you want to make out, you cruel tyrant."

"I don't mean what people do you like," said Sir George, gently, "for I believe you love everyone you come near, just as everyone loves you. I mean, what do you like to do best? What can I do to amuse you, to make the time go less slowly?"

"I like the fire best," said Gerty. "I like to sit before the fire, and look at the coals."

"Why?"

"It warms my poor bones," said Gerty. "And I see things there."

"Tell me what, Gerty, — tell me what. Do you ever see a little white sea-swallow that has winged its way, such a weary way, over the heaving sea to sing to an old man and soften his heart?"

"No," said Gerty, simply, "I don't ever remember to have seen that. I see black fellows, and ships, and balls, and things of that kind. I saw the quartz range beyond Neville's Gap once yesterday, where we go to get flowers. My word, what a rage poor mamma was in!"

"About what?" asked Sir George, much amused. "About the ships, or the black fellows?"

"About my book-muslin frock, you foolish thing, and my complexion; there wasn't a bit of it as big as your hand that wasn't torn. And there *were* black fellows in this story, too — for, when I found I was bushed, I had to go and look after them to take me home; and I followed the cattle-tracks till I came to the great Billebong where they were fishing, and I made them up stick and take me home. Lord! you should have seen me coming in state over the paddock with my hair down, and five-and-forty black fellows, lubras, picanninies and all, at my heels. You would have laughed."

"I think I should," said Sir George.

"Mamma didn't," said Gerty. "I was as brown as you; and that book-muslin cost a deal of money. She made such a fuss about it before the black fellows, that they went back and tracked me to the Grevillea Scrub, to get the shreds of it which were left on the thorns, thinking they were some priceless tissue. They kept bringing pieces of it as long as your little finger, or smaller, to my mother ever so long, and wanting her to give them brandy and tobacco for them. She *was* angry."

"She must have had good cause, with six daughters like you to take care of."

"Yes. You see she had staked her reputation that we should marry better than the seven Brown girls. And what with poor papa going off at the Prince of Wales, with the gout getting into his stomach, and tallow down to three-pence, and all the hands on the burst at once, it was enough to make her anxious, wasn't it?"

"I should think so," Sir George would reply. And

then she would go chirrupping on again; and George would sit watching them from behind his book.

There was no doubt whatever that silly Gerty was making extraordinary way with the old man. Her amazing beauty, her gentleness, and her simplicity won the old man completely; while her piquant conversation as above (it was piquant enough from her mouth, though it may be dull from this pen), amused him immensely. Whenever she was utterly, unintelligibly, colonial in her language, Sir George would make her explain herself, and this would cause her to use other colonialisms worse than the first, to his intense delight. She was winning on the old man day by day, and George saw it with hope.

The old man would sit hours with her now. They neither bored the other. Gerty loved talking, and he loved listening to her strange prattle. Sir George grew sensibly more free with and kind to his son; and the odd eight thousand a-year — which Secretary Oxton had encouraged George to go to London and seek — seemed nearer to realization day by day. Old Compton, the lawyer, used to come often, as his wont was; and, as he saw Sir George and Gerty together so much, he took the trouble to watch them, and as he watched them he said, "A new will! — a new will! My young friend Erne will not be so rich as I thought."

George watched them too, with hope — hope sometimes alternated with despair. Sir George would be sitting beside Gerty absorbed in a kind of pitying admiration of her for an hour or more, when in would come Erne, who loved his sister-in-law, and loved to hear her talk in her strange *naïve* way, and would stand against his father's chair on the other side. And

then George would see the old man's right hand withdrawn from the arm of Gerty's chair, and his left go wandering up to smooth down the clustering brown curls, which hung on Erne's head like a garland.

Then George would set his teeth, and curse Erne silently in his heart, for his hatred of him grew stronger day by day. He *knew* that Erne was utterly simple and undesigning; that he loved Gerty — nay, that he loved *him*, George himself; but he would not know it. He fed his heart in secret denunciations of his brother. He let the devil in; and, to himself and in private, he cursed his brother for a designing young villain, knowing that he was lying all the time. The story of Cain and Abel is a very old one. Where were James and Aggy now?

People called on Gerty. The Nalders called; but Gerty was looking out of window, and saw them as they drove up, and wasn't at home. She would die sooner than be at home when that artful bold Yankee woman had the audacity to call and hunt up her husband — much sooner die, for then they would be sorry for her, and would not despise her. She had *some* spirit left, she thanked Heaven, though the cold *had* got into her bones. Nevertheless, she looked from behind the curtain as they drove away, and saw that Mrs. Nalder had been dressed by a Frenchwoman, and looked horridly handsome and amiable; and that Nalder had mounted a tall white hat on to his honest head, and wore what he would have called a white vest and black pants, although it was only half-past two in the afternoon.

Then, another time, some other horrid people called. She couldn't see who they were, but was sure they

were horrid, and she wasn't at home. But she heard a loud voice in the hall say, "Sure then, Phayley, we'll wait in the parlour till she come;" and then, with a little cry of joy, she ran out of the drawing-room, and the next moment she had buried her lovely head in the capacious bosom of Miss Lesbia Burke.

The good Irishwoman half laughed and half cried over her; at one time holding her at arm's length to get a good look at her, and the next hugging her again, like a dear old lunatic as she was; while Mr. Phelim O'Brien (the leader of the Opposition, James Oxton's deadly enemy) stood looking on, with a smile of infinite contentment on his handsome face. It appeared that he and his cousin, Miss Burke, were to be in London for some time on "bhisnuss," and they could meet again often. Lesbia brought all kinds of tender loves from half the colony; and, more, it was this battered old Irishwoman who had gone out of her way to Neville's Gap, that she might visit the quartz ranges, and bring Gerty a great nosegay of wild-flowers; and here they were in a band-box, triumphantly. They were all withered and dead — no more like their former selves, than was Lesbia Burke to the beauty of thirty years before; but some of the aromatic ones kept their scent still — the dear old bush scent — speaking of peaceful sunny summer days among the hot silent forests: and Lesbia's heart was as true and as loving now as it was when she learnt her first prayer at her mother's knee.

Gerty did not chirrup much to Sir George that night, but sat back in her easy chair, with the faded flowers on her lap, tying them up into various bunches like a child, and sometimes untying them and altering

them. Once she looked up and asked him whether he did not wonder why she was doing this, and he said "Yes."

"I am calling up the different holidays I have had, and am making up a bouquet for each one, of the flowers I remember best on those days, in order that you and George may put them in my coffin. I should like this bunch of silver wattle to lie on my heart, because they grow thick in the paddocks at Barker's Station, where George came and made love to me."

"You must not talk about coffins, my love," said Sir George. "Try cradles, hey? that is more to the purpose."

"It may be either," said Gerty, rising wearily. "I think I will go to bed. I think you had better send for Aggy; she is at the Bend. She will be here in an hour. I wish you could send for her."

Then the poor little woman looked wildly round the room and saw where she was; and, as she realized the fact that her sister was sixteen thousand miles away, she gave a weary little moan, which went to Sir George's heart.

"She is too far to send for, my love," he said, kindly. "I wish she were here."

"Stay," said Gerty. "Tell me, dear old papa, was Lesbia Burke here to-day, or am I dreaming again? I know she was. These are the flowers she brought me. George! George! send for old Lesbia!"

Lesbia Burke was sent for, and we need not insult your judgment by telling you that she came raging off instantly to the assistance of the sweet little bush flower. She was naturally a loud woman, and was rather louder than usual on her journey in consequence

of her impatience. But the moment she entered Stanlake doors, she, with the wonderful adaptive power of her nation, became transformed into a calm, dexterous, matronly lady, with a commanding power expressed in every word and attitude. She took possession of the house and ruled it. Sir George Hillyar had an eye for female beauty, but he told George that he had never seen anything like Lesbia Burke's poses before. When she swept into the library, at two o'clock in the morning, with the lighted candle close against her stern-marked face, and announced the event to them, both of them started. "The Siddons, as Lady Macbeth, would have hidden her head," said Sir George. She certainly was a terribly beautiful woman.

It was she who put the baby into bed with Gerty when the doctor gave leave; and who, when she heard Gerty's strange little croon of delighted wonder, fell on the astonished doctor and baronet's neck, and called him an "ould darlin'."

"Good heavens!" said Sir Ergot Savine; "I hope no one saw her. What would Lady Savine say? You never know what these Irish people will be at next."

CHAPTER XXIX.

James Burton's Story: the Beginning of the Bad Times.

"THE Simultaneity of certain Crises in Human Thought; more especially relating to the Results of Investigation into Mechanical Agencies," would form a capital title for a book, as yet to be written. As good a title as could be found (if you don't mind a little

American, and follow Sir Walter Scott's dictum about the title of books), because no one could by any possibility gather from it what the deuce the book was about, until they had read it.

The writer of this book would have to take notice that, for the last hundred years (say), intelligence has been so rapidly circulated, that the foremost thinkers in all civilized countries are at work for the same end at one and the same time. He would have to point out as examples (I merely sketch his work out for him) the simultaneous invention of steamboats on the Clyde and in New York; the nearly simultaneous invention of the Electric Telegraph in England and in America (though Cook and Wheatstone were clicking messages to Camden Town three months before the Yankees got to work). Again, for instance, the discovery of the planet Neptune by Adams and Leverrier; and last, not least the synchronic invention of the centrifugal bucket-lifter for emptying cesspools — claims for which were sent in at the same time by Ebenezer Armstrong, of Salford, and by James Burton, of Church Place, Chelsea.

What actually ruined us was, that none of us would go near the machine after it was made, and that it had to be worked by third parties. In his enthusiasm for science, I believe that my father would have gone and superintended, but his proposition was met by flat rebellion of the whole family. My father demanded whether or no he was master in his own house; whereto Emma, who had a vast deal of spirit at times, replied promptly, "No, don't let him think so. Nothing of the kind." Emma's having turned Turk startled my father, and caused him to reconsider the matter of his being

master in his own house in another, and, let us hope, a better spirit; for he only sat down and troubled me for his pipe. When he had nearly smoked it, he caught my eye, and said, "There was three or four keys wanted driving home, old chap; and a washer or two on the upper spindle would have broke no one's bones. Nevertheless, let be; she is right in general. It'll all be the same one day."

That night in the dark, Joe, who was at home, turned towards me and said:

"Jim, Erne Hillyar is making fine gentlemen and ladies of us. We oughtn't to have stopped his going to see the machine at work. I ought to have gone, and you ought to have gone also. We are getting too fine, Jim; it won't do."

I quite agreed, now I had time to think, and we determined to go the very next night.

But the very next day came Erne, looking so wonderfully handsome and so exquisitely clean, that going to Augusta Court to superintend the emptying of a cess-pool became absolutely impossible. Certainly, what Joe said was true; Erne was making fine gentlemen of us.

That night the gentlemen who had charge of the machine came home and reported it broken. It had to be repaired. To satisfy curiosity, it was what gold-miners call a California pump (which is an old Chinese invention), but with hollow paddles, nearly like buckets. We had not got it repaired for three weeks, and, by the time we got it to work again, Armstrong had sent in his claim, and we had the satisfaction of knowing that the delay was entirely our own fault.

Strange to say, the invention had been registered

some years, though, from want of practical knowledge, the machine had never been used. The former patentee instituted legal proceedings against my father and Armstrong. Cohen and Marks, the solicitors, bought up Armstrong, and we were nearly ruined.

So ends the history of my father's inventions. The other day my mother asked him whether he couldn't contrive a spring to prevent the front door slamming. He declined pointedly, saying that he had had enough of that in his life, and that she ought to be ashamed of herself for talking about such things.

Nearly ruined. All my father's savings, all Joe's little earnings, and most of the furniture, just saved us. We could keep the house over our heads, for we had taken it by the year, and my father and I had our trade and our strength between us and ruin still. And as is very often the case, troubles did not come singly. There was another forge established at the bottom of Church Street, and our business grew a little slack (for new brooms sweep clean). We knew that a reaction in our favour would set in soon; but, meanwhile, our capital was gone, and we had to depend on our ready-money receipts for the men's wages.

Those men's wages were a terrible trouble. I have had a peaceful, prosperous life, and have been far better used than I deserve; for the trouble about these men's wages is the worst trouble, save the great disaster of my life, which I have ever known. I had always been a great favourite with them, and used to skylark and chaff with them; but that soon was altered when the curse of poverty came upon us. I was so terribly afraid of offending them. Their wages must be paid on Saturday, or they would go to the other

forge. *We* had often to give trust, but we could never take trust from them. They had each eighteen shillings a week — two pounds fourteen; and one week we only took three pounds seven in cash. There was not a stick of furniture, or a watch, or a spoon left which could go.

Then began the time of short meals. There were no more “jints” now. The “kag-mag and skewer-pieces,” &c. contemptuously mentioned by my father to Mr. Compton, were now luxuries — luxuries which were not indulged in every day by any means. The first necessity was bread and butter for the “kids,” as our merry Reuben, absent through all of it, used to call them; the supply of that article and of milk-and-water was kept up to the last.

If the contemplation of a family who triumphantly come out strong, in the middle of a complication of troubles and difficulties, is pleasing to any of my readers, I should like him to have seen the Burton family in *their* troubles. It would have done his honest heart good to have seen the way in which we came out, when we hadn't really, for three weeks, enough, or near enough, to eat.

My mother took to singing about her work. She couldn't sing a bit. She never could and never will; but she took to it for all that. Some people take to playing the flute who can't play it at all, and therefore there is no reason why my mother shouldn't take to singing. At all events, she did, with an ostentatious light-heartedness which we could all see through. It would have been better if she had known any tune, but she didn't, and so we had to do without. Her singing, however, was better than some very fine

singing indeed, for it produced the effect intended; it showed us all that she was determined to act as pitch-pipe in the family choir.

And we took up the harmony with a will, I warrant you. We had always been an easy-going, gentle sort of family; but now our benevolence began to take an active form to one another, which was painful then, and is painful now when I look back on it. Our love for one another had before this run on in a gentle, even stream; now it had got on the rapids and become passionate; for the same unwhispered terror was in all our hearts — the terror lest, in the troubles and evils which were coming thick upon us, we might break up the old family bond and learn to care for one another less — the ghastly doubt as to whether or no, our love would stand the test of poverty.

Would it have outlived a year's disgraceful weary want, or would it not? That is a terrible question. Our troubles came so hard and fast, that *that* test was never applied to us. The only effect our troubles had on us was to knit us the closer together; to turn what had been mere ox-like contentment in one another's society into a heroic devotion — a devotion which would have defied death. And the one person who led us through our troubles — the one person who gave the key-note to our family symphony, and prevented one jarring note from being heard — the person who turned out to be most cheerful, most patient, most gentle, most shifty, and most wise of all of us — was no other than my awkward, tall, hard-featured, square-headed, stupid old mother.

Fools would have called her a fool. I think that, in the times of our prosperity, we older children had

got a dim notion into our heads that mother was not quite so wise as we were. Three weeks of misfortune cured us of that opinion, for ever and ever. That she was the most affectionate and big-hearted of women we had always known; but we never knew what a wonderful head she had till this time. When that great and somewhat sluggish brain got roused into activity by misfortune, we were almost awed by her calm, gentle wisdom. When better times came again, that brain grew sluggish once more; my mother's eyes assumed their old calm, dreamy look, and she again became capable of rambling in her line of argument, and of being puzzled on such subjects as potatoes. But we never forgot, as a revelation, the shrewd, calm woman who had appeared to us in our time of trouble; had advised, and managed, and suggested, and softened affairs, till one was ashamed of being discontented. We never forgot what my mother could be, when she was wanted.

Yesterday I was sitting at her feet, watching the sun blaze himself to death behind the crags of Nicnicabarlah. My youngest boy had played himself to sleep upon her knee, and the light of the dying day smote upon her magnificent face as I turned and looked up into it. And then I saw the old, old look there — the look of perfect, peaceful, happy goodness — and I blessed God that there were such people in the world; and then in my memory I carried that dear calm face back through all the turbulent old times at Chelsea, and I pondered there at her knee, until the darkness of the summer night had settled down on the peaceful Australian forest.

I have often spoken of my gentle sister Emma

hitherto. I have represented her to you as a kind, sensible, handsome girl, with an opinion of her own, which opinion was generally correct, and which also was pretty sure to be given — in short, an intensely loving and loveable, but rather uninteresting person — a girl, I should have said, with every good quality except energy. I should have said, up to this time, that it would have been difficult to make Emma take a sudden resolution, and act on it with persistency and courage. She was, as I should have said, too yielding, and too easily persuaded, ever to have made a heroine, in spite of her energetically-given opinions on all subjects.

Whether I was right or not, I cannot say; for she *may* have lacked energy hitherto: but she did not now. When my mother showed that remarkable temporary development of character which followed on her being thoroughly aroused to the change in our position, Emma looked on her once or twice with affectionate awe, and then took up the burden of my mother's song, and sung it busily and clearly through the live-long day. She sang the same old song as my mother did, though in clearer tones — a song of ten thousand words set to a hundred tunes. She sang of cheerful devoted love; the notes of which, though vibrating in a Chelsea fog, made the air clearer than the sky of Naples.

I saw the change in her quickly. There was no abrupt statement of opinions now. She set herself to follow my mother's example quietly and humbly. Once, after looking at my mother, she came and kissed me, and said, "Who would have thought her so noble?" From that time she became my heroine.

Erne came to see us just as usual; and until long after it was all over, he never found out that anything was wrong. Our intense pride made us cunning. We were always exactly as we were in old times, whenever he called. My mother and Emma never sang in that ostentatious way when he was there, and all violent demonstrations of affection towards one another were dropped. He was perfectly unacquainted with our terrible strait all through; but we knew that one word to him would have ended our troubles at once. We knew that fifty pounds would have tided us over the evil time, and that fifty pounds was to be had by asking; but we couldn't ask from *him*. More, we must not let him guess that we were in difficulties, lest he should offer, and we should have peremptorily, and without the help of ordinary tact (for we were lowbred people), to refuse his offer.

If you ask, Were there any further motives which caused us to be so cautious in keeping our difficulties from Erne? I answer, they are simply these: — My father and mother, who did not know of Erne's love for Emma, were too proud and high-minded to take advantage of him. Joe and I, who had become aware of that attachment, would have thought that we were selling our sister; and, as for Emma — why, I should not have liked to be the man who would have proposed such a thing to her. I would sooner have gone alone into Augusta Court or Danvers Street after dark, fifty times over, than have faced the tornado of passionate scorn which would have broken over any one's head who proposed to her to trade on Erne's love for her. And, moreover, although I had never seen Emma in a moment of terrible emergency, yet I knew, by a

kind of instinct, that Emma's dove-like head; which we had only seen as yet turned from side to side in gentle complacency, or at most raised calmly in remonstrance; was, nevertheless, capable of towering up into an attitude of scornful defiance; and that that gentle loving voice, in which we had heard no shrill note as yet, was capable of other tones — of tones as clear, as fierce, and as decided, as those of any scolding Peregrine.

This bitter trial of ours — (for three weeks, we elders were more than half starved, if you will excuse my mentioning it; and we pawned, to use my mother's forcible English, every stick of furniture and every rag of clothes that could be spared) — had a great effect on Emma. She never was dictatorial after this. Before this, she was as perfect as need be, but unluckily she thought so, and required sometimes what I, in my low vulgar way, would have called "shutting up." But, after my mother utterly astounded us all, by behaving as she did — taking the helm, playing first fiddle in the family quire, and drawing the family coach clear off the lee shore of despair (Harry says that there is a confusion of metaphor here, but Harry is a fool) — after those times, she was not only humbler in her suggestions, but developed a busy energy quite unlike the steady, peaceful diligence of the old easy-going times. When, shortly after this, in an emergency, she displayed courage and determination of the highest order, I was not in the least surprised.

How my father and I worked all this time! Real work was, alas! very slack, but we made work — made things on speculation — things which never were asked for, and which never were worth the coals they

cost. My father, a perfect Quentin Matsys, set to work on a small wrought-iron gate, from designs furnished by Joe, which, if completed, was to make his fortune. It was never finished; but I have it now, and a beautiful piece of work it is.

Erne brought us news from Reuben. He was going on just the same, and seemed as great a favourite as ever with Sir George, and, what seemed still stranger, with young Mr. George. Erne always lowered his voice now when he spoke of his brother. There was no doubt, he said, that George regarded him with deep jealousy and dislike. "He is afraid," said Erne, "of my coming between my father and him. I *never* do that. When he and my father are together I am seldom there, and when present silent. The only time I get with my father is when he and my brother's wife are together. I always join these two, and we three are very happy together."

And during all this time, in the midst of short commons, anxiety, and hard work, I had on my mind the terrible guilty secret of that dreadful room upstairs, and of what I had seen there. I was as silent as death on the subject. I had had no opportunity of communicating with Reuben since the night of my adventure; and the one small piece of comfort in the whole matter was, that Reuben was still away at Stanlake, and would, in all probability, follow the family in the summer. Therefore, whatever happened, he must be held to be innocent.

Meanwhile, I had not even Joe to consult with; for, a few days after our adventure in Reuben's room, he met with a singular piece of good fortune, which seemed likely to affect materially his prospects in life.

CHAPTER XXX.

James Burton's Story: in which two Great Pieces of Good Fortune befall us — one Visible, the other Invisible.

SIR GEORGE HILLYAR, I found out afterwards, had sat in Parliament twice in his life, on the Tory interest. If there had been any interest more re-actionary than the Tory interest, he would have connected himself with it instantly. He had utterly outnewcastled Newcastle ever since he married his keeper's daughter: since he had brought a plebeian Lady Hillyar into the house, it became necessary for the family respectability to assert itself in some other direction, and it asserted itself in the direction of Toryism. Sir George, with the assistance of a few others, got up a little Tory Revival; and they had so edified and improved one another — so encouraged one another to tread in new and higher fields of Toryism — as to be looked on with respectful admiration by the rest of the party. And among this small knot of men who claimed, as it were, a superior sanctity, Sir George Hillyar had the first place conceded to him, as the most shining light of them all.

At this time — at the time of our troubles — a general election was approaching, and Sir George Hillyar, at the solicitation of a powerful body of men, determined to enter public life for the third time, and contest, when the time should come, the borough of Malton.

We heard this news from Mr. Compton, and were wondering, why he had come to tell us about it, when

he struck us all of a heap by announcing a most remarkable piece of good fortune. Sir George had offered Joe the post of private secretary, with a salary of two hundred a-year.

"And what do you think of that?" said Mr. Compton, triumphantly, to Joe.

Joe was trying to express his astonishment and delight, when he fairly burst into tears; and I don't think any of us were very far behind him. We had always known that Sir George meant to provide for Joe, but we never expected such an offer as this to come at such a time.

"And what do you think of that? Is the salary enough?"

"Lord bless you, sir," said Joe; "never mind the salary. I'd go barefoot in such a place as that. There is no telling how I may end."

"Indeed, you are right," said Mr. Compton; "and you thoroughly deserve your good fortune. Sir George has employed me for a long time to make inquiries about your capacity and steadiness, and you have enabled me to make such a report of you as has secured you this offer. I wish you every success."

So Joe departed, dressed like a gentleman, "burning high with hope." The family troubles were to come to an end in no time now. All the morning before he went he was restlessly and eagerly, with flushed face, laying out his plans for our future benefit; and Emma either was, or pretended to be, as enthusiastic and hopeful as he was; and encouraged, nay, even surpassed, his boldest flights of fancy, until, by her arts, she had got Joe to believe that all which had to be done was already done; and to forget, for a time

at least, that he was leaving us behind in poverty and wearing anxiety.

Delighted as we were with his good fortune, we sadly felt the loss of one familiar face at such a time as that. But soon we had other things to think of, for our troubles came faster and faster.

On the Saturday night after Joe had gone, I noticed that our three men were unusually boisterous. Jack Martin, the head man, brother of Mrs. Avery, struck me as meaning mischief of some kind, and I watched him carefully. He hurried his work in a somewhat offensive manner, struck with unnecessary vigour, upset the tools and swore at them, — did everything in fact that he ought not to do, except lame any of the horses; with *them* he was still the splendid workman that my father had made him. But in whatever he did, all the fore part of the afternoon, the other two followed suit, though with smaller cards. They did not speak to my father or me, but they told one another stories, which were received with ostentatious laughter; and Martin seemed inclined to bully my fellow-apprentice, Tom Williams. My father and I knew what they were going to do; they were going to strike, and make it easier by quarrelling with us.

They had not much chance of doing that. I was very angry, but I imitated my father as well as I could; and he, that afternoon, was more courteous, more patient, and more gentle than ever. About three o'clock my father was called out on business, and they, to my great delight, began quarrelling among themselves. How little I thought what that quarrel would lead to!

The moment my father's back was turned Jack Martin

began on Tom Williams, the apprentice, again. At first he confined himself to impertinences, and kept addressing him as Werk'us (he was a parish boy, which made my father very jealous about having him ill-used or insulted, as Jack Martin well knew); but after a time, finding that Tom was as gentle and as patient as ever, he began to take further liberties, and dropped two or three things on his toes, and once threw a shoe at him. Meanwhile I would have died sooner than interfere on behalf of Tom, though I could have stopped Jack Martin at once.

Now the third and youngest of our men, who had been with us about a year, was a young Cornishman, Trevittick by name: a very taciturn, almost sulky fellow, who had resisted all our efforts to be intimate with him, but who had in his silent, sulky way conceived a great regard, certainly never exhibited in public, for Tom Williams, the apprentice. After he had been with us about a month he had obtained my father's consent to Tom's sharing his lodgings, at his, Trevittick's expense. Shortly afterwards I made the surprising discovery that he and Tom used to sit up half the night reading mechanics and geology, and that Tom was bound to the very strictest secrecy on the subject. To this man Trevittick, therefore, whose personal appearance was that of a very strong Jew prize-fighter, with frizzly purple hair, I, on this occasion, left the defence of Tom Williams, with the most perfect confidence.

Trevittick was at this time the most absolutely silent man I ever met in my life. Consequently, when Jack Martin had, for a pretended fault, taken Tom Williams by the hair of his head and shaken him, and

Trevittick had said, in a short, sharp growl, "Leave that boy alone, you coward," Jack Martin stood aghast, and asked him what he said.

"You heerd what I said well enough. Do it."

Martin was very much surprised, and made no answer for an instant; but the word "yield" (or more correctly the expression "shut up") and Jack Martin were utter strangers; so he walked up to Tom Williams, collared him, and shook him again.

"Drop that boy now, Jack, or I'll make 'ee," growled Trevittick once more, in a rather deeper tone.

After this, according to the laws of London honour, there remained nothing but for Jack Martin to call on Trevittick to "come outside;" which corresponds to the "after school" or "the old place" of your early days, my dear sir. But Jack had not time to say the words, when my father — who had been waiting outside, talking to a man on business — thought fit to come in, and to say in a very gentle, polite voice,

"Mates! mates! if you'll be so good as to work in my time, and to quarrel arterwards in your own, I shall be obliged."

So they set to work again, I all the time, like a low-lifed boy as I was, thinking what a splendid fight there would be in Battersea fields the next morning; for there were certainly not a dozen men in the prize-ring who could have stood long before either Jack Martin or Trevittick.

But at six o'clock, although there was still work enough to keep my father and Tom Williams and me hard at it till two o'clock on Sunday morning, my father said it was time to knock off, and took out the men's money. Jack Martin was paid first, and he, I

knew, would be spokesman. When he got his money he spit on it, and then jingled it in his closed hands.

"Come, Mr. Burton," he said, in a tone of injured innocence. "Why they're a-giving of a pound down at Jumston's. That's what Jumston's a-doing on. A-giving of a pound."

"And I think, Jack, as Mr. Jumston's giving two shillings too much. Why, that six shillings as you men are asking for, is six shillings off the kids' victuals. Six bob's worth of bread and butter, as I'm a true man."

Jack Martin began to talk himself into a passion, while my father raised himself on to the forge, and sat comfortably on the edge of the cinders.

"Well, then, I'll tell you where it is," said Jack Martin, "me and my mates must look to ourselves. White men, leave alone Druids and Foresters, is not slaves nor negro Bones. Nor are they going to be, Mr. Burton; thank you for your kind intentions all the same. Come, sack us, will you? Take and give the sack to the whole three on us. Come."

"I don't want to give you the sack, Jack Martin," said my father. "I'm a ruined man, as you know. But I won't rob the kids."

"Then this is where it is," said the other, who had now got himself into as towering a passion as he could have wished; "the master as won't give the pound when asked, nor the sack when challenged, is no master for me or my mates."

"Well, you needn't get in a wax over it, old chap," said my father. "If you like to stay for eighteen bob, stay. I don't want you to go."

"Not if we know it, thank you," said Jack, louder

than ever. "We must look to ourselves. If you won't give us the sack, why, then we'll take it. Now!"

"I've been a good and kind master to you, Jack. I've taught you your trade. And now, when things look a little black, you want to leave me. And you're not contented with leaving, but you are so ashamed of your meanness that you puts yourself into a passion, and irritates and insults me. Now it runs to this, Jack. You're a younger man than me: but if you hollers like that, in this here shop, I'll be blowed if I don't see whether I can't put you out of it. You'd better go."

Jack was so astonished at such a speech as this coming from the pacific James Burton, that he departed wondering and rather ashamed. My father paid the other man, and he went, and then he turned to Trevittick, who was sitting on the anvil, and offered him his money.

"Never mind me, master," growled Trevittick, speaking now for the first time; "*I ain't a-going to leave you. I was going this morning, but I've thought better of it. Never mind thikky money neither. I've a-got to fight to Jack Martin to-morrow morning, and I should be knocking that down, and a deal more too. You'm best owe me my wages a few weeks. I've saved lots, ain't I, Tom?*"

But Tom Williams had disappeared. And looking at my father I saw that he had coloured scarlet up to the roots of his hair, but was quite silent. After a time he managed to say to Trevittick, "Thank ye, lad — thank'ee, kindly." That was all he said, and all that Trevittick wanted him to say.

Trevittick went out without another word; but in about half an-hour he came back with Tom Williams,

and silently set to work. When my father got behind him he began telegraphing to Tom Williams, and Tom replied by nodding his head nearly off, and smiling. Then the next time my father got near Tom he patted him on the back; by which things I knew that Tom had contrived to stop the fight, and that we should never know whether the Cornishman or the Londoner was the best man. Was I a little disappointed? Well, I am afraid I *was* a little disappointed. It was so very long ago, you must remember, and I did not write "Honourable" before my name at that time. But strict truth compels me to state that I *was* a little disappointed; I was indeed.

Meanwhile we three set to work, and worked far into the night: none of us any more conscious of the astounding piece of good fortune which had befallen us than was Fred, asleep on Emma's shoulder, with his balmy breath upon her cheek.

CHAPTER XXXI.

George begins to take a New Interest in Reuben.

THERE was no doubt at all that what Erne had said was true. So anxious was he not to come between his brother and his father, that he never interrupted them in a *tête-à-tête*; nay more, seldom saw much of his father except in the presence of George's wife, Gerty. These three, however, were very much together, and enjoyed one another's company immensely.

George was furious at this arrangement; he had set Gerty on his father expressly to see what she could do. She was making immense progress with the old man,

when Erne stepped in, as it seemed to him, and interfered. He attributed Erne's eager pleasure in the society of his sister-in-law to the very deepest *finesse*. In his generous conduct he chose to see nothing but the lowest and meanest cunning.

"Look at him," he would growl to himself behind his book; "look at the artful cub, with his great eyes, and his gentle voice. Who would think he was such a young sneak? practising off his arts against those of my — Oh! my trebly-dyed fool of a wife. If she had had an ounce of brains, we might have had that will altered long ago. If I could only get her to quarrel with Erne! But she won't, and I daren't scold her, for fear she should show signs of it before her father. Oh! if she only knew what I was saying to her under my breath sometimes! — if she only knew that!"

George could hate pretty well, and now he got to hate Erne most decidedly. Poor fellow! he still loved his wife to some extent, but she made him terribly mad with her silliness sometimes. It was well for Gerty that she was under the protection of Sir George Hillyar. James Oxton would have trembled had he seen the expression of George's face now at times. The long-continued anxiety about his succession in his father's will was wearing him into a state of nervous excitement. He, at this time, took up with one of his old habits again. He used to go to London and play heavily.

Reuben had stayed about Stanlake so long that it was just as well, said Sir George, that he should stay on until they went to the Thames in the summer. Although he was only hired by the month, yet every one about the place would have been universally sur-

prised if anything had occurred to terminate his engagement. He was considered now to be a sort of servant to Erne, who seemed much attached to him; but every one knew that it was by the wish of Sir George himself that Reuben was retained there. Also it is singular, that the well-trained servants found out that Reuben was to be called Reuben, and that the name of Burton was not to be used at all; and when Joe made his appearance as secretary, they were instructed to address him as Mr. Joseph. Some of the older servants, who remembered Samuel, knew well enough why; and wondered to themselves whether or no he knew who Reuben was.

It was not very long after the arrival of the George Hillyars, that George, walking through the grounds, by the edge of the lake, near the boat-house, came across Reuben; who, with his boat-mending instinct, acting under the impression that he must do something, was scraping a fir sapling with a spoke-shave, trying to make a punt-pole of it: which is what no one, who cares for a ducking, ever did yet. He was also singing to himself a song very popular at that time among the London youth, which may be advantageously sung to the tune of "Sitch a getting up stairs:" if you can only get the words, which I fear are lost for ever. Reuben had his back to George, and George heard him sing, with the most determined cockney accent —

"The very next morning he was seen,
In a jacket and breeches of velveteen.
To Bagnigge Wells then in a bran
New gownd she went with this 'ere dog's meat man.
She had shrimps and ale with the dog's meat man.
And she walked arm and arm with the dog's meat man,

And the coves all said, what around did stan',
That he were a werry nobby dog's meat man.
Oh he were such a handsome dog's meat man,
Such a sinivating titivating dog's meat man."

George Hillyar called out, "Hallo, you fellow!"

And Reuben, not seeing who it was, replied, "Hallo, you fellow! it is." And then he turned round, and, seeing who it was, was shent, and thought he was going to catch it.

"I ask your pardon, sir," he said; "I thought you was the turncock come for the income-tax. There," he added, with one of his irresistible laughs, "don't be angry, your honour. I can't help talking nonsense at times, if I was hung for it."

"Are you the young waterman that my father has taken such a fancy to?"

Reuben sheepishly said he supposed he was.

"I shouldn't advise you to treat him to many such songs as you were singing just now. You should try to drop all this blackguardism if you mean to get on with him."

"Lord bless you, sir," said Reuben, "you'd never make nothink of me. I've been among the coal barges too long, I have."

"I've seen many a swell made out of rougher stuff than you; you might make rather a fine bird in other feathers. How old are you?"

"Twenty, sir."

"Has he given you any education?"

"Has who, sir?"

"Sir George, of course."

"No, sir," said Reuben, in wonder.

"What a shame," thought George to himself. "I wonder what he is going to do for him. There is one

thing," he went on thinking, and looking at Reuben with a smile; "there is no mistake about the likeness: I shall make friends with the son of the bondwoman. I wonder who the dickens *she* was. I like this fellow's looks, much."

"Who is your friend?" he asked aloud, pointing to a young man who had just come up, and was waiting respectfully a little way off.

"That is my cousin James, sir."

James Burton, who has told some three quarters of the story hitherto, here approached. He was a tall, good-looking lad of about eighteen, with an amiable round face, and yet one which gave you the idea that he was neither deficient in brains nor determination. He approached George with confidence, though with great respect, and waited for him to speak.

"So you are Erne's friend the blacksmith, hey?" said George.

James said "Yes."

"And how does your pretty sister do, eh, lad? I am very anxious to see this pretty flame of Erne's. If she is as pretty as Erne says she is, the young rogue must have an eye for beauty."

James blushed very much, and looked very awkward, at this free and easy way of implying an engagement between Erne and Emma. He said nothing, however, and immediately George turned away from him and began talking once more to Reuben.

This was their first interview, and very soon Reuben had won over George Hillyar as he had won his father. Another noticeable fact is that the old man perceived George's growing liking for Reuben, and seemed pleased

at it. George had nothing to complain of in his father's treatment of him. So George was very kind indeed.

If Erne could have been got out of the way, George thought, every thing must go right.

He had been home about six months, when one morning he would go rabbit-shooting, and so he sent for old Morton, the head keeper, and they went out alone together.

It was a glorious May day, a day on which existence was a pleasure. And they left the moist valley and the thick dark woods far behind them, and climbed up the steep slope of the chalk down, to shoot among the flowering broom, which feathered the very loftiest summit. They stood up there, with the county at their feet like a map, and the happy May wind singing among the grass and the junipers around them.

Poor George felt quieter up here with his old friend. He had been to London the night before, playing, and losing heavily, and he had been more than usually irritated with Erne that morning. Instead of setting to work shooting, he sat down beside old Morton on the grass, and, taking off his hat, let the fresh wind blow his hair about.

"Morton, old fellow," he began, "I wish I hadn't got such a cursed temper. You mayn't think it, but I very often wish I was a better fellow."

"You are good enough for me, Master George," said the old man. "You were always my favourite."

"I know it," said George. "That is very queer. Did you think of me all the time I was away?"

"I always thought of my own plucky lad that I taught to shoot. I thought of you constant through all

that weary time. But it's come to an end now. You sowed your wild oats, it's true."

"But I haven't reaped them," said George, with his head on his hands.

The old man took no notice of this; he went on: "And here you are home again, with the most beautiful of all the Lady Hillyars, since there were a Lady Hillyar. And Sir George coming round so beautiful, and all —"

"But I am disinherited," said George; "disinherited in favour of Erne."

"Not disinherited, sir. I know more than that."

"Next thing to it," said poor George. "I know as much as that."

"There's time enough to alter all that; and mark my word, Master George, I know Sir George better than any man living, and I can take liberties with him that you durstn't — bah! that Master Erne durstn't. And I tell you that sweet little lady of yours has wound herself round his heart, in a way you little think. I held you on my knee when you were a little one, and I dare say anything to you. I hearn you cursing on her to yourself for a fool, the other day. Now you leave her alone. Fool she may be, but she will do the work if it is to be done. I hearn 'em together, Sir George and her, the other day, and I says to myself, 'Either you are the silliest little hare of a thing as ever ran, or else you are the artfullest little —'. There, I forget. You let her alone. If it is to be done, she'll do it."

"No, she won't, old fellow," said George. "There's Erne in the way. There's Erne, I tell you, man. He never leaves them alone together. He is always

thrusting his cursed beautiful head in between them, and ruining every thing." (Here he gave way, and used language about Erne which I decline to write, though there was not a single oath, or a single improper expression in it). "Why, I tell you, Morton, that fellow's beauty, and amiability, and affectionate gentleness, and all that sort of thing, as nearly won me as possible. At one time I was saying to myself, 'If my father denies me justice, I shall be able to get it from him;' and so I thought, until I saw that all this amiability and gentleness was merely the art of a beautiful devil. When I saw him declining to do battle with me, like a man, and saw him sneak in between my wife and my father, then I said to myself — then I said to myself — Oh, stop me, old Morton, and don't let me talk myself mad. I want to be better. I swear to God I want to be better. But I am sinking into hell, and there is no one to save me. Where's James Oxton? Why was he fool enough to let me leave him? And Aggy; how these shallow-brained women delude us, with their mincing airs of wisdom! See what they have brought me to now."

Perhaps, if the poor fellow had chosen to make friends in his own rank in life, he might have found one honest, educated man, who would have set everything right for him; at all events have shown him that his suspicions of Erne were incorrect, and have made the ordinary routine of life, in his own rank, more pleasant to him. But he had, through vanity and idleness, early in life acquired the taste for being the greatest man in the company; and the only company where he was king was the company of his inferiors, and the passion stuck to him, and so there he was, at

the turning point of his life, telling his troubles to a foolish old gamekeeper.

The old man said nothing to turn away George's wrath from Erne. Why should he? George had always been his favourite, and he believed what he said about Erne. No; he only tried to soothe the poor fellow with commonplaces, and let him sit with his head in his hands until the wild fit had passed over. Then old Morton was glad to hear him change the conversation.

"What do you think of that young Reuben?" asked George.

"Reuben," said the old man, laughing; "why, every one is fond of Reuben. A merry, cheeky young dog."

"I have taken a great fancy to the fellow myself. I have a very great mind to take him for my servant."

"I daresay he would make a good one, master," said Morton. "But I should have thought you had had one too many of that name. His father wasn't so satisfactory an investment as might be, and —"

"His father," said George, looking quickly round. "Are you mad?"

"Do you mean to say," said the other eagerly, "that you don't know that this Reuben's name is Burton, and that he is the son of your old servant Samuel, by — you know who?"

George started up, and stood looking at Morton, silent and deadly pale, with his hands clasped wildly in his hair, for nearly a minute — a ghastly sight to see. Then with a groan he sank on his knees, and his look of blank horror was changed into one of pitiful entreaty.

"Morton! Morton! don't kill me. The dog has de-

ceived me. Don't tell me that *she* is alive too. Don't kill me by telling me that."

"Get up from the grass, Master George. You frighten me. She died ten year ago, or more."

The look of terror left George's face by degrees. It was evident that he had had a fearful shock.

"How long ago did she die, did you say?"

"She died when Reuben was about ten years old. Jim Burton, the Chelsea blacksmith, asked me to come over to her funeral, as having known her once. And I went. Reuben was the *second* child, Master George. There was one that died."

"Are you certain of that?"

"Positive and certain sure. I took care to be. I see its little coffin carried to the grave. And the poor thing, *she* told me herself that it was the eldest."

"He wrote and told me," said George, "when he was transported, that she was dead, and — There, we have talked enough about that. Do you know that he and I have quarrelled?"

It was Morton's turn to look astonished now. "You and who?" he said, with a blank stare.

"I and Samuel Burton have quarrelled."

"Do you mean to tell me he is not dead yet?"

"Curse him, no. He has far more life left in him than you have, my faithful old friend. He came to my office in Palmerston the other day, and I quarrelled with him."

"That was unwise."

"It was; but, at all events, he is safe for the present. He is at Perth, in Western Australia, 14,000 miles away."

"I am glad of that," said old Morton. "I suppose he *daren't* come home, eh?"

"Oh, dear, no," said George. "He *daren't* come to England. He would get life for it. Come, let us begin."

They began shooting. Morton, with the licence of a keeper, combined with that of a confidential friend, said, "Mind the dogs, sir. In your present state of nerve, mind the dogs."

But George shot beautifully. The old trick had come back to him again after a few months' practice; and his hand and eye were as true as ever. He shot recklessly, but wonderfully well, appearing all the time to be so utterly absent and distraught, that old Morton kept on saying, "Mind the dogs, sir; for Gawd's sake, mind the dogs. It's old Beauty, the Governor's pet; and if anythink happens to that there spaniel — Lord a mercy, look at that. I say, Master George, hold hard, sir. You ain't in the humour to shoot rabbits before Clumber spannels worth twenty guineas a-piece. Hold hard, sir. Now, do hold hard."

"I'm shooting better than ever I shot in my life," said George.

"Too beautiful by half. But leave off a minute. That last shot was too risky; it were indeed."

"All right," said George, going on with his loading. "Have you seen this girl Emma that Erne *raffoles* about?"

"Yes, sir. She is daughter of Jim Burton, the Chelsea blacksmith. — Here, Beauty; here Frolic. — There, put down your gun a bit, Master George. There."

"Is her name Burton, too?" said George. "Why,

the air seems darkened with Burtons. I thought somehow that she was cousin to Joseph, the secretary. Or did I dream it?"

"Why, *his* name is Burton, too, and she is his own favourite sister," said the old man. "He is Reuben's cousin. But you mus'n't say the name of Burton in that house. It's a word mus'n't be said at Stanlake."

"Why not?"

"I don't know, and nobody don't know; and very probably, with an obstinate man like the Governor, there ain't very much *to* know. We were children together, and I know him better than any man alive, and maybe like him better than any man alive, except one. But I tell you that, in the matter of obstinacy, Balaam's ass is a black-and-tan terrier to him. For instance, *I* don't know to this day whether or no he knows that Reuben is Sam, the steward-room boy's son. Mr. Compton don't know either. Mr. Compton says he has never forgiven Sam. We soon found out that we were to call Reuben by his Christian name. And he makes Joe Burton call hisself Joseph."

"But this Emma;" asked George, "is there any chance of Erne's putting his foot in it with her?"

"He swears he will marry her," said Morton. "The governor did the same thing himself, and so, maybe, won't find much fault."

"Do you know anything about the girl? What is she like?"

"She is a fine-made, handsome girl. But she is better than that. I want to tell you a story about her. I have known her father, Jim Burton, Lord love you, Master George, why as long as I've known Mr. Comp-

ton; and they was two boys together, was Mr. Compton and him. You ain't got a cigar, sir?"

"I have known James Burton, sir," continued the old man, lighting one, "ever since I was a boy, and I have always kept up an occasional acquaintance with him: and on one day, just before you came home, I was over there, and he said to me, laughing, 'What a game it is to hear they young folks a-talking, good Lord!' I asked him what he meant, and he said, 'Why, my girl Emma has been pitching it into Master Erne like one o'clock. Such airs with it, too — pointing her finger at him, and raising her voice quite loud, calling him by his Christian name, and he answering of her as *fierce* —' And I asked what he and the girl fell out about, and he said that Master Erne had been going on against you — that you wern't no good; and that she'd up, and given it to him to his face."

"She must be rather a noble person; I'll remember *him* for this," said George. "Come, Morton, let us go home."

So he walked rapidly homeward in deep thought, and Morton guessed what he was thinking about — Reuben. Reuben, George saw, was his own son. There was a slight confusion about the date of his birth, and the poor woman had lied to Morton; but there was no doubt about his features. That square honest face could belong to no son of the thin-faced, hook-nosed Burton. No, there was the real Hillyar face there. That unset mouth was not Hillyar either, certainly, but he knew where *that* came from. Yes; now he knew what it was that attracted him so strangely to Reuben from the first. Reuben had looked on him with the gentle eyes of his dead mother.

The old keeper once, and once only, ventured to look into his face. He hardly knew him, he was so changed since they had gone that road two hours before. His face was raised, and his eyes seemed set on something afar off. His mouth was fixed as though he had a purpose before him, and his whole expression was softened and intensely mournful. The old man had seen him look so when he was a boy; but that was very, very long ago.

CHAPTER XXXII.

Gerty's First Hybernation Terminates.

THE sun was so warm on the south side of the house, that Gerty had come out on the terrace, and was drinking in the floods of warmth and light into her being. The first thing she had done, her very first instinct after a few minutes of what was dreadfully like sun-worship, was to dash at the flowers with a childish cry of delight — anemones, ranunculuses, tulips, narcissuses, all new to her. George found her with her hands full of them, and held out his arms. She gave a laugh of joy and sprang into them, covering his head with her flowers.

Her George had come back to her arms with the warm weather. The ugly cold winter had passed. It was that which had made George cross to her; every one was splenetic during an English winter. The French laughed at us about it. If they could only get back to the land of sunshine and flowers, he would never be unkind to her. If she and he and baby could only get back again to the dear old majestic forests,

among the Orchises and Lobelias and Grevilleas, with the delicious aromatic scent of the bush to fill their nostrils, they would be happy for evermore. How faint and sickly these narcissuses smelt after all, beautiful as they were. One little purple vanilla flower was worth them all. Bah! these flowers smelt like hair oil, after the dear little yellow Oxalis of the plains. She covered his face with kisses, and said only —

“Take me back, dear — take me back to the old forest again. We shall never be happy here, dear. The flowers all smell like pomatum; there is no real warmth in the sun. And it is all so close and confined: there is no room to ride; I should like to ride again now, but there is no place to ride in. Take me back. We were happier even at Palmerston than here. But I want to go back to the bush, and feel the sun in my bones. *This* sun will never get into your bones. Take me back to the Gap, dear.”

“And leave my father here?” said George, laughing. “For shame.”

“Why shouldn’t he come too?” said Gerty.

“You had better propose it to him,” said George, kissing her again.

“I will this very night,” said the silly little woman. And, what is more, she did. And, what is still more than that, Sir George, after sitting silent a few minutes, said, “I’ll be hanged if I *don’t*.” And after Gerty had twittered on for ten minutes more in praise of the country of the Eucalypti, he looked up and said to the ambient air, “Why the deuce *shouldn’t* I have a spree?” And when she had gone on another quarter of an hour on the same subject, he looked up again, and then and there wished he might be wicked-worded

if he didn't. I believe he would have run over, if circumstances which have made the history of these two families worth writing had never occurred. But — to save the reader any unnecessary anxiety — he never did.

Poor little Gerty! How she revelled in this newly-restored love of her husband's. How she got drunk upon it. How the deep well-springs of her love overflowed, and not only drowned George and the baby, but floated every object it came near: horses, butlers, dogs, tulips, ladies'-maids, ranunculuses, and grooms. It was well she was a fool. She was so glad to see George take such notice of the young waterman; what a kind heart he had! Poor little thing; who would have dared to tell her the truth about him and Reuben? If she could have been made to understand it, which I doubt, I think it would have gone far to kill her.

Sir George Hillyar marked George's increased attention to Reuben with evident satisfaction. One day, overtaking George in the shrubbery, he took George's arm with a greater show of affection than he had ever done before, and walked up and down, talking very kindly to him. They spoke about no family matters, but it was easy to see that George was gaining in his father's favour. As they were talking together earnestly thus, Mr. Compton and Erne came round the corner on them. Mr. Compton was very much surprised, but noticed that the arm which Sir George took from his elder son's, to shake hands with his old friend, was transferred to Erne, and that George was left to walk alone.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

James Burton's Story: the Ghost shows a Light for the Second Time.

It was about three days after our men had struck and left us, that something took place which altered the whole course of our lives in the most singular manner.

It was a dark and very wet night. The King's Road, as I turned out of it into Church Street, at about half past eleven, was very nearly deserted; and Church Street itself was as silent as the grave.

I had reached as far as the end of the Rectory wall, when, from the narrow passage at the end of the Lime trees, there suddenly came upon me a policeman, our own night-policeman, a man I knew as well as my own fellow-apprentice. At this I, being in a humorous mood, made a feint of being overcome with fear, and staggered back, leaning against the wall for support.

"Stow larks, Jimmy," said the constable, in a low, eager voice. "Something's going wrong at home. I have orders to stop you, and take you to the inspector."

"So it had come, then," I thought to myself with a sickening feeling at my heart. I couldn't find words to say anything for a moment.

"I had no orders to take you into custody, Jimmy," the constable whispered; "only to tell you to come to the inspector. There's nothing again your hooking on it, if you're so minded."

I answered, returning as I did — and heaven help

me! sometimes do still on occasions of emergency — to my vernacular, “I ain’t got no call for hooking on it, old chap. Come on.” (“Cub awd,” is more like the way I said it than anything else.)

And so we came on: my old friend the constable continuing to force home the moral that I weren’t in custody, and that there weren’t nothink again hooking on it: until, at the corner of the place I have chosen, for fear of an action for libel, to call Brown’s Row, we came against the man whom, also for fear of an action for libel, I call Detective Joyce.

He was alone, under the lamp of the Black Lion. When he saw us, he took us over to the other side of the street, and said, quite in a low voice, “Is this the young man Burton!”

I, with that self-assertion — with that instinct of anticipating adverse criticism — that strange, half cowardly feeling, that there is some unknown advantage in having an innings before the other eleven get in, which is a characteristic of the true Londoner — replied that it was, and that any cove who said that I had been up to anythink, was a speaker of falsehoods, cut off from all hopes of happiness in the next world.

“Well, we all guess that,” said the inspector. “What we want to find out is, how much do you know about your precious flash cousin Reuben’s goings on? I don’t suppose you’ll tell us till you are under cross-examination, as you will be pretty soon. You’re in custody, lad. And *silence*, mind. There; I’ve seen a deal that’s bad, and that’s wrong, but I never saw anything that shook my faith in folks like this. Why, if any man had told me, six weeks ago, that old

Jim Burton, the blacksmith, would have harboured Bardolph's gang and Sydney Sam, I'd have knocked him down, I think."

"He never knew nothing of it, sir," I said eagerly. "Me and Joe ——"

At this point my old friend, the night-policeman, garotted me with singular dexterity. As he held his hand over my mouth, and I struggled, he said to the detective inspector,

"Come, sir. Fair play is a jewel. Jimmy — I should say, the young man — is in custody. Take and caution him, sir. I asks you in fairness, take and caution on him."

The inspector laughed. "Everything you say will be put in evidence against you. I mean, you d—d young fool, hold your tongue."

This took place against the railings of a milk shop, on the left-hand side as you go down towards the river, opposite a short street which leads into Paulton Square (which at the time I speak of, was "Shepherd's Nursery," or, to old Chelsea folk, "Dove-house Close"). This narrow street, which is now widened, was in my time Brown's Row, a mere court of six-roomed houses, from among which rose majestically the vast old palace which was in the occupation of my father.

As I stood there, with the horror and disgrace on me of being in custody for the first time in my life; with the terror of I know not what upon me; I could make out, in spite of the darkness and the rain, the vast black mass of our house towering into the sky to the west. I could make out the tall, overhanging, high-pitched roof, and the great dormer-window, which projected from it, towards us, to the east; the windows

of the Ghost's room — of Reuben's room — of the room where I had stood helpless, waiting for my death. I knew that the present complication was connected with that room: and with a sick heart I watched the window of it. I was right.

How long did we stand in the rain — the inspector, the constable, and I? A hundred years, say. Yet I looked more at that window than anywhere else; and at last I saw it illuminated — dimly at first, then more brightly; then the light moved: and in a moment the window was dark again. And, while I saw this, with throbbing eyes, the inspector's hand closed on my arm with such a grip as made me glad I was a blacksmith, and he whispered in my ear —

"You young rascal! You see that light? Take me to the room where that light is, or you'd better never have been born! And tell me this, you young scoundrel: Are there two staircases, or only one?"

Now that I saw clearly and entirely, for the first time, what was the matter, I wished to gain a moment or two for thought. And with that end, I (as we low boys used to say in those times) "cheeked" the detective.

"Tell you! Not if I know it! And everything to be took down in evidence! Find out for yourself. I'm in custody, am I? Then take me to the station and lock me up. I ain't going to be kept out in the rain here any longer. Who the dèuce are you, cross-questioning and Paul-Pry-ing? What's your charge against me?"

"You'll know that soon enough, you young fool," said the inspector.

"But I'll hear it now. I want to be took to Mil-

man's Row and the charge made; that's what I want. And I'll have it done, too, and not be kep' busnacking here in the rain. I'll make work for fifty of you in two minutes, if you don't do one thing or the other."

And, so saying, I put my two forefingers in my mouth. What I meant to do, or what I pretended I meant to do, is no business of any one now; all that concerns us now is that I never did it, and never meant to do it. I did not whistle. I have mentioned before that Alsatia was only just round the corner.

Our policeman caught my hands, and said, pathetically, "Jimmy, Jimmy, you wouldn't do such a thing as that!" And the inspector said, "You young devil, I'll remember you!"

"Am I in custody, sir?" I asked.

"No, you ain't," said the inspector. "You may go to the devil if you like."

"Thank you," I said. "Common sense and courtesy are not bad things in their way, don't you think? I shall (now I have bullied you into time for thinking) be delighted to inform you that there is only *one* staircase; that I shall be glad to guide you to that room; that I sincerely hope you may be successful; and that I only hope you will do the thing as quietly as possible."

My thoughts were these. Reuben, thank heaven, was safely away: and really, when I came to think of the annoyance and disgrace that Mr. Samuel Burton had caused us, I looked forward to his capture and re-transportation with considerable indifference — not to say complacency. Consequently I went willingly with them.

As we came to our door we came upon four other

constables, and one by one we passed silently into the old hall. As I passed our sitting-room door, I could see that my mother and Emma were sitting up and waiting for me, and immediately went on, considering what effect the disturbance, so soon to begin, would have on them. And then, going as silently as was possible up the broad staircase, we stood all together in the dark, outside Reuben's room. What should we find there?

At first, it appeared nothing; for the door being opened, the room seemed empty. But in another moment that magnificent ruffian I have called Bill Sykes, had sprung into sight from somewhere, and cast himself headlong at the constables, who were blocking up the door. For one instant I thought he would have got through and escaped; but only for one. I saw him locked in the deadly grip of a young Irish constable, by name Murphy, and then I saw them hurling one another about the room for a few seconds till they fell together, crashing over a table. They were down and up, and down again, so very quickly, that no one had time to interfere. Sykes had his life-preserver hanging at his wrist, but could not get it shifted into his hand to use it, and the constable had dropped his staff, so that the two men were struggling with no more assistance than Nature had given them. Before or since I have never seen a contest so terrible as between this Englishman and this Irishman.

And after the first few seconds no one saw it but me. The sound of the table falling was the signal for a rush of four men from the inner room, who had, to use a vulgar expression, "funked," following the valiant scoundrel Sykes, but who now tried to make

their escape, and found themselves hand to hand with the policemen. So that Sykes and the noble young Irishman had it all to themselves for I should think nearly a minute.

For in their deadly grip, these two did so whirl, and tumble down, and roll over, and get up, and fall again, that I could not, for full that time, do what I wanted. It was clearly a breach of the Queen's peace, and I had a right to interfere, on those grounds even; and, moreover, this dog Sykes, in this very room, had coolly proposed the murder of my own humble self. It was for these reasons that I wished, if possible, to assist this young Irishman; but I could get no opportunity for what seemed to me a long while. At last they were both on their feet again, locked together, and I saw that the Irishman's right hand was clear, and heard it come crashing in with a sickening rattle among Sykes's teeth. Then I got my arm round Sykes's neck, and in spite of his furious efforts managed to hold him fast, and all the while Murphy — bah! — it is too terrible — until, while I was crying out shame, and threatening to let him go, the burglar and I fell together to the ground, and Murphy came down on Sykes heavily, breaking three of his ribs. Yet, in spite of his terrible injuries, in spite of his broken jaw, and such internal injuries as prevented his being tried with the rest, this dog, whom I would not save from hanging to-morrow, never, in spite of his agony, gave one whine of pain from first to last. When we thought we had secured him, and a constable was preparing his handcuffs, he raised his horribly battered face, and burst out again, striking Murphy a blow behind the ear, which made the poor fellow totter and

reel, and come headlong down with his nose bleeding, snoring heavily, quite insensible. It took the whole force of us even then to secure this man, though he was so desperately injured.

But at last there came a time when Sykes lay on his stomach on the floor, conquered and silent, but unyielding; when Murphy, the young Irish constable, had left off snoring so loud, and had made three or four feeble efforts to spit; when Bardolph and Pistol, with three other scoundrels — for whom I have not time to find imaginary names, and whose real names, after a long series of convictions and aliases, were unknown to the police, and possibly forgotten by themselves (for there are limits to the human memory) — were walked off ironed down the stairs; when the constables had lit candles and the room was light; when there was no one left in it after the struggle, but the inspector, and Sykes, with the one man who watched him, and Murphy, with the one man who raised his head and wiped his mouth, and myself, who cast furtive glances at the door of the inner room, and my father, who stood in the door-way in his shirt and trousers, pale and fierce, and who said:

“This is some more of Samuel Burton’s work. This has come from harbouring his boy — his bastard boy — that I treated like one of my own. I knew that I was utterly ruined three days ago. But I thought I might have been left to die without disgrace. May God’s curse light on Samuel Burton night and day till his death! Have you got him?”

“We haven’t got *him*, Burton,” said the inspector. “But I am afraid that, in spite of your rather clever denunciation of the man you have shielded so long

under the wing of your respectability, we must have *you*. You are in custody, please."

This was the last and worst blow for my father. He spoke nothing for an instant, and then said hoarsely, pointing to me, "Are you going to take *him*?"

The inspector said no; that he did not want me, but told me to be very cautious, and mind what I was about, which I fully intended to do without his caution. In fact, I was doing so now.

Where was my cousin Samuel? When would the inspector notice the door into the other room? And would my father ask me to get his coat? I was very anxious about this last matter. Either I must have gone for it, or have excited the inspector's suspicions; and I wanted to stay where I was.

In a few moments he saw the door. My father and I followed him towards it, intending to give him our assistance should there be any one there. He flung open the door, and, to my surprise, the room was empty. The bed, the old box, the lumber, were all gone. And, moreover, the hole that I had made in the floor three years before was there no longer. I saw at once that the scoundrels had by means of that hole discovered the vast depth between the floor and the ceiling below, and had utilized it. They had cunningly used old wood too, in their work; and so, walking over the place where the hole had been, I felt no less than four boards loose under my feet; and then I came to the conclusion that no less a person than Samuel Burton was stowed away below.

I ought to have given him up. And I should like have given him up; but when it came to the push I would not. My heart failed me. I stood there until

the inspector turned to go; and the secret of the loose boards was left undiscovered.

If I had known that no one was under there, except poor trembling Nym, I might have given *him* up, perhaps. But Samuel Burton was not there at all. Samuel Burton had found that William Sykes was rather too clumsy and incautious a gentleman to have anything to do with, and had, in his usual manner, pitched the whole gang overboard. That is to say that, seeing Reuben safe out of the way, he had dropped a line to Scotland Yard, which resulted as we have seen. Samuel himself was somewhere else, at far different work.

I was furiously indignant at my father's being arrested. Looking at it from my point of view, it seemed to me to be a perfectly unnecessary insult. I suppose it could not be helped. One thing was certain, however, that it would be the last ounce on the camel's back to him, and that in future my father would never raise his head again in England.

Two things remained to be done — the one, to fetch my father's coat and waistcoat from his bedroom, which was not difficult; and the other, to break the fact of his arrest to my mother, which was easy enough, but not a pleasant task by any means — at all events in anticipation.

But, when I knocked at their bedroom, I found her up and dressed, with his things ready; and not only her, but Emma. And my mother only said cheerily, "Dear, dear. What a shame. Going and taking of father. There, Jim, my dear, take him his coat and waistcoat; and here's the old horse-rug. And

we'd best sit up to go for Mr. Child and Mr. Chancellor in the morning to bail him. There, cut away, old man. They ain't took you, I know; for I listened to 'em. On the stairs I did. God bless us, father will be in a taking. We must have him home by breakfast, or they sausages will spile. Cut away, or he'll catch his death."

And so she chattered on, and packed me out of the room. But when I was gone, Emma tells me, she broke out into wild hysterical wrath, and denounced fiercely and wildly — denounced Bill Joyce (as she irreverently called the inspector), and said that marrying eaves-droppers and earwigs might be some folks' line, but that it was not hers, and never had been. She said how true her instinct was, to have refused to say anything to the man twenty years before; though she thought that even an earwig might have forgotten in that time, and not disgraced her husband like that; and so she went on until she got quieter. And at last she said, as Emma tells me: —

"May God forgive me, as I forgive them all. May God forgive Samuel Burton, whom I met on the stairs last week, and fainted away stone dead on account on. He has been an unlucky man to us. It's on his account that I hate the name of Hillyar. It was through his going to them, child, that all our troubles came about. He was not so bad till he got corrupted by that devil George Hillyar. I hate the name. I am glad of one thing in this break up, my Emma; and that is this — we shall see no more of this Master Erne. You are a child, and don't know. But I tell you, that the time is come for you to part with him. Better too soon

than too late. Red eyes are better than a broken heart."

My mother, on the other hand, tells me that, as she said this, she looked at Emma, and saw — why, many things; among others, that it *was* too late. Emma was sitting opposite her, deadly pale, with a worn, wearied look on her face, put perfectly quiet and self-possessed. She said,

"What you say is very true, dear. He and I must part for ever. Perhaps, mother, if this had not happened, I might have begged to have a little, only a very little more of him; for —. But now, I thank God, that has become impossible. This business will separate us for ever; and it is best so. I might have fallen in love with him, for aught we know, and what a sad business that would have been; would it not? May I see him only once — just to wish him good-bye? Only once, mother? Oh, mother! mother! only once."

"No," said my mother, promptly, "that is all fiddlededee, and stuff, and nonsense. It's all over and done, and dead and buried, and I won't have it took and dug up again. Take and go along with you, I tell you."

And so my mother scolded her, and then went to her solitary bed — solitary the first time for twenty years — and lay down and wept wildly. "I am a wicked, stupid, useless woman, oh, Lord," she said. "But, Lord! I did not see it. And it is to be visited on her head. The fathers upon the children; my folly on her. But, Lord! it will break her heart — my own Emma's heart. I seen it to-night, and I know it. Oh, Lord! wicked woman that I am,

let the judgment fall on me, Lord! Let me suffer, but take her to Thy bosom and comfort her."

* * * * *

We shall see how my mother's prayer was answered.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

Sir George's Escritoire.

POOR Reuben Burton, whose only crime had been faithfulness to the scoundrel he called father, received a message that some one wished to speak to him at a certain public-house, and was then and there quietly arrested and taken to London; so that during the events which followed he was in prison, be it remembered. That he was *very* wrong in receiving his father into the Burtons' house at Chelsea we cannot say. But a little more resolution would have saved the Burtons an infinity of trouble.

The Hillyars wondered where he was. Erne had the impudence to propose cutting the dam to search for his body; and Sir George said, loftily, that it was, in his opinion, rather contemptible taste in Erne, to refer, to allude, however faintly, to an idiotic and highly expensive escapade, which ought to be consigned to oblivion. Erne proposed to send for Joseph, the secretary, to take his father's words down; and so they had one of their numerous pleasant squabbles — the one among them all which Erne remembered best — while Gerty sat and laughed at them.

She had taken the baby, and a pile of flowers, and

had set herself down under the south wall, opposite the sun-dial, just outside the drawing-room window, in a blazing heat, fit to roast a peacock; and there she was now, with the baby and the flowers, doing something or another with them, though whether she was nursing the flowers, or tying up the baby, it was hard to say. There she was, as happy as ever a little mother was, basking herself, and cooing in her infinite contentment.

Her suggestion about Reuben Burton, which she made in perfect faith, was that he had gone into the township, and got on the burst. This brought the heartiest roar of laughter from George that we have ever heard him indulge in. Gerty was very much delighted. She determined that she had said something very good, and must try it again.

The old butler never went to bed before Sir George, but always sat up in one of the easy chairs, in the third or smallest drawing-room, with the door open. For exactly opposite this door was the door of Sir George's study, and so, if Sir George went to sleep in his chair, as he very often did, the butler could, after a reasonable time, go in and wake him up, and take him to bed, generally in a very stupid state.

But very often the butler would go to sleep, and his candle would go out, and he would wake in the dark, wondering where he was, and would go in to rouse Sir George, and would find that Sir George had gone to bed hours ago; and that the sparrows outside, after a sleepy night's debate of it (that honourable member the nightingale having been on his legs for nearly four hours, and having concluded his answer to the Opposition about daybreak), had woke up and divided, and

had all got into the wrong lobbies, and were pitching into the tellers: in other words, that it was broad daylight. And this very night he went to sleep in this way, and let his candle burn down.

Sir George that evening had complained of its being cold, which it most certainly was not, and had ordered the fire to be lit in his study. The butler in the little drawing-room, snoozing in the chair, did not feel cold. But Sir George sat close before the blaze, musing, and looking into the coals, thinking intensely.

It may have been this, to some extent, which caused certain things to happen this very evening, of which you will hear immediately. We cannot say. We cannot see the inside of a man's head, unless we open it. But I don't think it was a good thing for Sir George, with his apoplectic habit, to sit close before a hot fire, thinking intensely.

While we are writing we have looked into the fire, and all that we have seen there was Glen Roy and Glen Spean, filled with gleaming ice, and the little double summit of Mealderry, like an island in the midst of it: in fact, Lyell has been answerable for our coal formations; in the which thing there is a certain sort of fitness. To-morrow it will be some one else who is answerable for the vagaries. To-morrow in the fire, one may see Messieurs Assolant and Renan receiving, at the International Exhibition of 1873, at Chicago or Charleston, as the case may be, the Aluminium medal, for having achieved, and entirely and utterly mastered, the subjects of the English nation and the Christian religion. Or, possibly even, M. Thiers in the act of being presented with a new pair of brass spectacles by the Emperor, for his accounts of the battle of Water-

loo, and other battles; which, doubtless, as specimens of military history, stood alone until Cousin Tom and Cousin Jerry fell out in America.

The fact is that, if you are a real fire-worshipper, you can't control the fantastic images which present themselves to your retina, when you have your brain rather full of blood, and are comfortably looking into a good coal fire. As in the beautiful old optical experiment of the glass globe in the dark (which some wiseacres, one of whom, at least, ought to have known better, have invested with supernatural properties, and called the Magic Crystal), you *see* what you are thinking about, as you do in dreaming; though in an inferior degree.

Sir George Hillyar sat and looked into the fire. From the first moment he looked there he saw four figures. They had been with him nearly all day, and now they stared at him out of the coal chasms. They were the figures of his two wives, with their two sons; and, as he looked at them, he thought deeply and intensely over the results of his life.

How well he remembered his first courtship. What a noble, square-faced, bold-eyed young fellow he was, when he first met Kate Bertram at the Lymington ball. How well he could remember her that first night. How beautiful she was; and he the madman, seeing, as he did, the wild devil in her eyes, admired it, and was attracted by it. "She has a spice of the devil in her," he had said to a friend. She had indeed.

And then by degrees he had found out the truth. At first he had laughed at the horrid idea; then he had grown moody over it; then he had entertained it sometimes, and at last he had taken it to his bosom and

nursed it. She had never loved him. She had always loved that rattling, merry sailor, Lieutenant Somes. Then he was slowly growing to hate her; until at last, she justified his hatred by dishonouring him.

And then her son. Had he been just to George? Had George's wickedness justified all the neglect he had received? Did he, the father, never feel something like satisfaction at the boy's career, as furnishing him with an excuse for the dislike he had always felt for him? And how much of that reckless despair had been caused by this very same neglect? These were terrible questions. A few months ago he would have answered them by an overwhelming flood of self-justification; but death was drawing nearer, and after death the judgment. He left them unanswered.

Was he doing right in disinheriting George? Was he not cutting off George's last hope of reform by impoverishing him in this way? He went to the escritoire, let down the desk of it, and, sitting down before it, took out his will and began reading it.

Eight thousand a-year to Erne, and George left nearly a beggar, with the title and establishment to keep up. It was not just. He said aloud, "I fear I am *not* doing justice to George. But my Erne—" He laid down the will again, and went once more and sat before the fire.

Then the old man lived some more of his life over again. His brain was very active, and his memory most wonderfully good to-night. He felt again the indignation, the shame, and the horror, which had torn him, as it were, to pieces, when he discovered that his wife had fled. The dislike which he had allowed to grow up in his mind towards her had been no prepara-

tion for *that*. Could he ever have dreamt that she would have *dared*? Could he ever have supposed that his calm, gentlemanly obstinacy would have driven her to commit such a nameless horrible crime (for so it was to him) as to leave the husband she hated for the man she loved? The agony of recollecting the shame of that dreadful time brought the blood humming into his ears; but it went back again, and throbbed itself into stillness once more.

For, passing through, in his fancy, in his memory, lightly enough, and yet correctly, the period which followed on this, the great horrible shame of his life; he went through a time of dull despair; then a longer one of godless cynicism; and then a longer one yet, of dull acquiescence in things as they were: the time when he believed that God had got tired of him, and had put him aside to be dealt with only after death. And, when his imagination had taken him through these sad, sad old times, and he had felt, let us hope in a less degree, all his old agonies once more; then the old gentleman's face began to brighten, and his stern set mouth to relax into a happy smile.

For, wandering on through the wood of his life — a wood, as he humbly acknowledged, full of strange paths (of which paths he had generally taken the wrong one), tangled with brambles, which he had never broken through — going on, I say, through this wood of his life, which he now began to see was not an honest English copse, but a labyrinth, in which he had never turned the right way, and which he was now going through all, again — he came to this:

He began to remember the dear old scent — far dearer to him, and some others, than the whiff one

gets opposite Piesse or Rimmel's shop — of his newly-loaded gun. Then he thought of fresh trodden turnips in September. Then a pheasant whirred above his head; and then he was breast-high among the golden fern under the browning hazels: and then, rustling ankle-deep in the fallen leaves, came Mary Hawkins, the gamekeeper's daughter, the beautiful and the good, and her arm was round his neck and her breath was on his cheek, and she said to him, "It is not too late, yet, George. God has sent me to save you, my love."

And when she had done her work God took her; and left in her place Erne to keep him from despair. Erne the delight of his life, the gentle handsome lad, who had wound himself so round his heart. He could not take this money from Erne. It might be unjust, but it was so pleasant to think of Erne's having it.

Yet death was near, and might come at any time. And afterwards — some justice must be done to George. Half, say. There was the will, and there was the fire — and Erne — and George —

* * * * *

The butler was awakened by a light, a sudden light, on his face, and a sound which seemed to him to be one of those terrible, inexplicable, horrible noises, which never occur in life, but which are sometimes heard towards the end of a very bad dream — of one of those dreams from which the sleeper awakes himself by an effort, simply from terror of going on with it any further. Sir George was standing in the corridor before him, with a candle held close to his face, and a drawn sword in his hand, looking down the passage. The poor old gentleman's face was horribly distorted, and red; and, before the old butler had time to stagger

to his feet, the noise which had awakened him came again. It was Sir George Hillyar's voice, for the butler saw him open his mouth; but the tone of it was more nearly like the ghastly screech of an epileptic than anything the old man had ever heard. He saw Sir George stand for an instant, pointing down the corridor with his sword, and crying out, "Reuben! Reuben! Help! Help! Come at once, and I will do justice to all. Reuben! Reuben!" And then he saw the poor old gentleman go staggering down the passage, with his drawn sword in his hand; and he followed him, very truly sorry for his kind old master, but reflecting, nevertheless, that all folks, high or low, must go off somehow, and hoping, even in the few minutes following, that his summons might come in a more peaceful manner. He saw clearly that Sir George had got his first stroke, and that he would never be the man he was any more.

"I hope he ain't altered his will," said the sleepy butler, a red-hot Erneist, to himself, as he followed poor reeling Sir George down the passage. "Poor dear old master! I wonder if he really is ill or no. Maybe there ain't much the matter with him. I wish I dared collar him. Where is he going?"

Sir George, meanwhile, with his sword in his right hand, feeling the wall with his left, which held the candlestick, staggering fearfully from time to time, had passed from passage to passage, until he had come to the kitchen. Once or twice at first he had cried out, in that terrible tone we have noticed before, for Reuben, but latterly had been silent.

The terrified butler saw him enter the kitchen. The next instant there was a heavy fall, and, following his

master in, he found darkness and silence. He cried out for help, but none came for a few moments; only a cat in the butler's pantry hard by knocked down some glasses, and tried to break out of the window in her terror. The silence was terrible. He shouted again, and this time roused the household. When lights were brought they found Sir George lying on his face quite dead, with his sword and his candle thrown far from him in his fall.

When they had carried him up, the first thing the butler did was to send for old Morton, the keeper, who came at once.

"Dead!" he said; "he ain't dead, I tell you. Here, Sir George, sir, rouse up. I've see him this way twenty times." He quite refused to believe it. He kept on at intervals speaking to the dead man. Sometimes he would give him his title; at others he would merely call him George. At one time he would be angry with him; at another he would almost whisper to him, and remind him of his dogs and his guns, and scenes which the closed eyes should never look on any more; but at last he did nothing but sit and moan wearily. No one dared interfere, until the new Sir George Hillyar came, and quietly and kindly led him away.

CHAPTER XXXV.

James Burton's Story: Miss Brown's Troubles come to an End, while Mr. Erne Hillyar's fairly commence.

WELLINGTON ROW, Kentish Town, is a row of semi-respectable houses, in the most dreary and commonplace of all the dreary and commonplace suburbs which lie in the north of London. I should suppose that the people who inhabit them may generally be suspected of having about a hundred a year, and may certainly be convicted, on the most overwhelming evidence, of only keeping one servant.

At least Mrs. Jackson, at No. 7, only kept one, and she wasn't half strong enough for the place. Mrs. Jackson didn't mean to say that she wasn't a willing girl enough, but she was a forgetful slut, who was always posturing, and running after the men, "and so at times it was 'ard to keep your temper with her; indeed it were, I do assure you."

Now the history of the matter is simply this. Martha Brown, the servant-of-all-work ("slavey," as a snob would so suggestively have called her), was a delicate and thoughtful girl, which things, of course, are serious delinquencies in a pot-scourer and doorstep cleaner; but, beside and above these crimes, she had committed the crowning one of being most remarkably pretty — which, of course, was not to be tolerated.

So she had rather a hard life of it, poor thing. Mrs. Jackson was not, on the whole, very kind to her; and, being a she-dragon, not well-favoured herself, she kept such watch and ward over her pretty servant;

accused her so often of flirtations which were entirely imaginary, and altogether did so wrangle, scold, and nag at her; that sometimes, in the cold winter's morning, wearily scrubbing the empty grate, or blowing with her lips the smouldering fire, the poor thing has bent down her head and wished that she was dead, and calmly asleep beside her mother in the country churchyard.

She was a country-bred girl, an orphan, who had come up to London to "better" herself, (Lord help her!) had taken service in this dull, mean neighbourhood, and was now fearful of moving from sheer terror of seeing new faces. And so here she had been, in this dreadful brick-and-mortar prison, for more than three years, rising each morning only to another day of dull drudgery of the lowest kind. Perhaps, sometimes, there might be a moment or two for a day-dream of the old place she loved. But day-dreams are dangerous for a slave with a scolding mistress. The cat may get at the milk, the meat may burn; and then wrangle and nag for an hour or so, and, ah, me! it is all over —

"She looks, and her heart is in heaven: but they fade —

The mist and the river, the hill and the shade;

The stream will not flow, and the hill will not rise,

And the colours have all passed away from her eyes."

What kept her up, you wonder! Only hope. And — well! well! "People in that rank of life don't fall in love in the same way as we do," said a thoroughly good fellow to me the other day. I beg solemnly to assure him that he is quite mistaken.

Every time when anything went wrong with this poor little Cinderella, as soon as the first scalding tears

were wiped, she had a way, learnt by long and bitter experience, of calling up a ghost of a smile on her poor face. She would say to herself, "Well, never mind. My holiday comes next Sunday three weeks."

I beg to apologize for telling one of the most beautiful stories ever written (that of Cinderella) over again in my clumsy language. But there are many thousand Cinderellas in London, and elsewhere in England, and you must ask Dr. Elliotson or Dr. Bucknill how many of them go mad every year.

And, as the monthly holiday approached, there would be such a fluttering of the poor little heart about the weather — for it is quite impossible to look one's best if it rains, and one likes to look one's best, under certain circumstances, you know — and such a stitching together of little bits of finery, that the kettle used to boil over sadly often, and unnoticed coals to fall into the dripping-pan, and wrap the meat in the wild splendours of a great conflagration; and there would be more scolding and more tears. However, all the scolding and all the tears in the world can't prevent Sunday morning from coming; and so it came. And this was a rather special Sunday morning — for there was a new bonnet with blue ribands, a rather neat thing; and so she was rather anxious for a fine day.

But it rained steadily and heavily. It was very provoking. The people were going into church by the time she reached Clerkenwell Prison, and it still rained on: but, what was worse than that, there was nobody there!

Up and down the poor child walked, under the gloomy prison-wall, in the driving rain. It is not an inspiring place at any time, that Clerkenwell Prison-

wall, as you will agree if you notice it the next time you go by. But, if you walk for an hour or more there, under a heavy disappointment, in a steady rain, waiting for some one who don't come, you will find it more melancholy still.

The people came out of church, and the street was empty once more. Then there were tears, but they were soon followed by sunshine. The spoilt bonnet was nothing now; the wet feet were forgotten; the wretched cheap boots, made of brown paper sewn together with rotten thread, the dreary squalor of the landscape, the impertinences of passing snobs, were nothing now; — everything was as it should be. For there was the ring of an iron heel on the pavement, and the next minute a young fellow came hurling round the corner, and then —

Well! Nobody saw us do it but the policeman, and he was most discreet. He looked the other way. He had probably done the same thing himself often enough.

I had run all the way from Chelsea, and had almost given up all hopes of finding her; so, in the first flutter of our meeting, what between want of breath, and — say, pleasurable excitement — I did not find time to tell her that my news was bad; nay, more than bad — terrible. I hadn't the heart to tell her at first, and, when I had found the heart, I couldn't find the courage. And so I put it off till after dinner. She and I dined at the same shop the last time we were in England, and oh! the profound amazement of the spirited proprietor at seeing a lady in thick silks and heavy bracelets come in to eat beef! We had to tell him all about it; we had, indeed.

At last it all came out, and she was sitting before me with a scared, wild face. My cousin Reuben and my father had been arrested, but my father immediately released. Sir George Hillyar was dead, and Joe's heart was broken.

"The grand old gentleman dead!"

"Yes. Got up in the night out of his chair, wandered as far as the kitchen, and fell dead!"

"How very dreadful, dear."

There was something more dreadful coming, however. I had to break it to her as well as I could. So I took her hand and held it, and said —

"And now we are utterly ruined, and the forge fire is out."

"But it will be lit up again. You and your father have your skill and strength left. You will light the forge fire again."

"Yes," I answered, "but it will be sixteen thousand miles away. In Australia, dear."

Now I had done it. She gave a low piteous moan, and then she nestled up close to me, and I heard her say, "Oh, I shall die! I know I shall die! I can't bear it without you. I couldn't have borne it so long if I hadn't thought of you night and day. Oh, I hope I shall die. Ask your sister Emma to pray God to take me, dear."

"Why you don't think I am going without you, do you?" I hurriedly asked.

"You *must* go," she answered, crying.

"I know I must; and you must come too. Are you afraid?"

"How could I be afraid with you, darling. But you *must* go, and I must stay behind and die."

"Never mind about that, love. Are you afraid?"

"Not with you."

"Very well, then. You'll have the goodness to get a recommendation from the parson, as an assisted emigrant, *at once*. If you can't, you must pay your passage and that'll be a twister. Now go home and give warning."

"I couldn't do it, dear," she said, with her sweet, honest eyes beginning to sparkle through her tears, and her mouth beginning to form a smile.

"Couldn't do what?"

"Give warning. I should fall down in a dead faint at her feet."

"Nonsense," I said. "Have it out the minute she opens the door."

"She won't open it. I go in the airy way, and as soon as she hears me come in she comes down and has a blow up at me."

"Can't you get in a wax, old girl?" I asked with an air of thoughtful sagacity, for I saw the difficulty at once.

Old girl thought this perfectly hopeless; and, indeed, I thought so too.

"Then I tell you what. Don't give her time to begin. Get between her and the door, and says you, 'If you please, ma'am — if you please, ma'am — I wish to give you a month's warning.'"

"Month's warning," repeated she.

"And then you take and hook it upstairs."

"Hook it upstairs," repeated she.

"You haven't got to *say* that to her. That's what you've got to *do*. When you come to the word 'warning,' say it out clear, and cut off."

At last, after many trials and repetitions, I got her to give me warning in a reasonably audible tone of voice; after which I saw her home. She made a mess of it after all, as I thought she would all along. She let the woman get between her and the door; and so had to stay and be scolded. But it "eventuated" rather well; for she *did* get into a "wax" for the first time in her life, and gave the woman as good as she brought. Astonished at her own suddenly-acquired audacity, and perfectly unused to fighting, she committed the mistake, so common among young fighters (who have never been thrashed, and therefore don't know the necessity of quarter), of hitting too hard. The end of which was that she was turned out the next day for a nasty, impudent, careless, sleepy, aggravating, and ungrateful little audacious hussey; which was a grand success — a piece of luck, which even I, with my highly sanguine temperament, had never dared to hope for.

While I was yet standing in the street, and making the remarkable discovery that I was wet through, and rather thinking that it must have been raining cats and dogs ever since I had been out, some one came and laid his hand upon my shoulder, and, looking up, I saw Erne Hillyar. He told me that he had come to find me, and then he told me something else — something which made me sit down on a muddy door-step in the rain, and stare at him with blank amazement and horror.

Erne Hillyar told me that he was a homeless beggar.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

Le Roi est Mort — Vive le Roi.

"I CANNOT conceal from you the fact, my dear Sir George Hillyar," said Mr. Compton, the morning after the funeral, "that your father's death at this moment is a very serious catastrophe indeed."

"Very serious to me, I suppose?" said George.

"Very much so, indeed. It is my belief that, if your father had lived another week, he would have altered his will in your favour."

"You are quite sure that he has not done so?"

"Quite sure. He would never have done it without my assistance."

"Do you hear that, you — you — Lady Hillyar?" said George, with a savage snarl, turning to Gerty, who was sitting nursing the baby.

She looked so very scared that old Compton interposed. "My dear Sir George — now really — her ladyship is not strong —"

"Silence, Sir," replied George; "I am master here, and allow no one to interfere between me and my wife. Leave the room, Lady Hillyar, and ask your fellow-conspirator against your husband, — the game-keeper's grandson, my worthy half-brother — if he will be so condescending as to be so obliging as to come and hear this precious will, which he and the lawyer seem to have concocted between them, read out."

"Sir George, I will not be insulted; you will remove your papers to some other office."

"Delighted, I am sure," said George, with an insolent sneer; for the old devil of temper was raging full career within him, and there was no help by. "It won't be worth much to any one. I shall insure this house over its value, and then burn the God-forgotten old place down. I don't care what I do."

"Sir George, for God's sake!" said Compton, shocked to see that the devil had broken loose once more after such a long sleep. "Suppose any one heard you, and there was a fire afterwards!"

"I don't care!" said George, throwing himself into the chair in front of the escritoire, in which his father had sat the night before he died. "Oh, here is the noble Erne, who plots and conspires to rob his brother of his inheritance, and then sneaks night and day after my wife to prevent her getting the ear of my father."

"George, George, you are irritated; you don't mean what you say."

"Not mean it!"

"You can't, you know; you are a gentleman, and you can't accuse me of such a thing as that."

"I will! I do!" said George.

"Then I say that it is false. That is all. *I* do not wish to continue this discussion now; but it is false."

"False!" shouted George, rising and advancing towards Erne. "Is it false that I have sat watching you so many months, always interfering? Is it false that I have sat and cursed you from the bottom of my heart? Perhaps you will say it is false that I curse you now — curse the day you were born — curse the

day that my father ever caught sight of your low-bred drab of a mother."

George had come too close, or had raised his hand, or something else — no man knows how it began; but he had hardly uttered these last words when he and his brother were at one another's throats like tigers, and the two unhappy young men, locked together in their wicked struggle, were trying to bear one another down, and uttering those inarticulate sounds of fury which one hears at such times only, and which are so strangely brutelike.

Before Compton had time to cry "murder" more than once, George was down, with his upper lip cut open by a blow from Erne's great signet-ring. He rose up, pale with deadly hatred, and spoke. His wrath was so deep that cursing availed him nothing. He only said in a low voice, "I will never, never forgive that blow as long as I live. If I ever get a chance of returning it, remember it and tremble, Master Erne."

Erne had not had time to cool and get ashamed of himself yet. He merely returned his brother a look of fierce scorn.

"Now," said George, "let us have this precious will read, and let me turn him out of the house; I shall have that satisfaction. Have you the will?"

"It is in here," said Mr. Compton. "This is the key of the escritoire. Sir George always kept it here, because he had a fancy that in some desperate extremity he might wish to put in a codicil in a hurry. We shall find it in this morocco box. — God above us! What is this? Let me sit down: I am a very old man

and can't stand these shocks. There is no will at all here!"

"No will?" said both of the brothers together.

"Not a vestige of one," replied Compton, looking suddenly up at George.

George laughed. "I haven't stolen it, old fox. If I had known where it was, I would have. In an instant. In a minute."

"I don't think you have taken it, Sir George," said Compton. "Your behaviour would have been different, I think. But the will was here the day before Sir George died, I *know*, and it is not here now."

"Look! Search! Hunt everywhere, confound you!"

"I will do so. But I have a terrible fancy that your father destroyed this will, and was struck down before he had time to make another. I have a strong suspicion of it. This will has been here for ten years, and never moved. My opinion is that there is no will."

He made some sort of a search — a search he knew to be hopeless, while George stood and looked on with ghastly terror in his face. Erne had grown deadly pale, and was trembling. At last the search was over, and Compton, sitting down, burst into a violent fit of sobbing.

George spoke first. "Then," said he, in a voice which rattled in his throat, "everything is, with the usual exceptions, mine?"

"I fear so."

"Every stick of timber, every head of game, every acre of land, is it not so? — all mine without dispute?"

"Nearly so. If we can find no will. And that we shall never do."

"You have heard what he has said," said George to Erne, wiping his mangled lips, "and you heard what I said just now. This house is mine. Go. I will never forget and never forgive. Go."

Erne turned on his heel, and went without a word. The last he remembers was seeing his brother stand looking at him with his face all bloody, scowling. And then he was out of the house into the sunshine, and all the past was a cloud to him.

God had punished him suddenly and swiftly. He very often does with those He loves best.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

James Burton's Story: Erne's Nurse.

"WILL God ever forgive me, Jim? I wish my right hand had been withered before I did it. I shall never forget that bleeding face any more. Oh, my brother! my brother! I would have loved you; and it has come to this!"

And so he stood moaning in the rain before me, in the blank, squalid street; and I sat on the step before him, stunned and stupid.

"I shall never be forgiven. Cain went out from the presence of the Lord. Look, his blood is on my right hand now! How could I? How could I?"

What could I say? I do not know even now what I ought to have said. I certainly did not then. I was very sorry at his having struck his brother certainly; but seeing him stand homeless and wet in the rain was

more terrible to me. I did not for one instant doubt that what he said was perfectly true, and even then I began to ask of myself, What will become of him?

"Oh, father! father! I wish I was with you! I shall never join you now. He used to say that he would teach me to love my mother when we met her in heaven: but we can never meet now — never — never!"

This last reflection seemed to my boy-mind so very terrible that I saw it was time to do or say something; and so I took his arm and said —

"Come home, master, and sleep."

"Home! my old Jim? *I* have no home."

"As long as I have one you have one, Master Erne," I answered, and he let me take him away with me.

It was a weary walk. I had to tell him of our misfortunes, of our ruin, of Reuben's ruin, of Joe's terrible disappointment, and of the sad state of mind into which he had fallen — of the cold forge, of the failing food. I had to tell him that the home I was asking him to share with me had nothing left to adorn it now but love; but that we could give him that still. It eased his heart to hear of this. Once or twice he said, "If I had only known!" or "Poor Reuben!" And when I saw that he was quieter, I told him about our plans; and, as I did so, I saw that he listened with a startled interest.

I told him that Mr. Compton had advanced money to take us all to Cooksland, and that we went in a month, or less; and so I went on thinking that I had interested him into forgetting his brother for a time. But, just as we turned into Church Street, he said —

"*She* must never know it. I shall die if she knows it. I shall go mad if she knows it."

"What?"

"Emma must never know that I struck my brother; remember that."

I most willingly agreed, and we went in.

The dear comfortable old place was nearly dismantled, but there was the same old hearth, still warm. Our extreme poverty was, so to speak, over, but it had left its traces behind still. My father looked sadly grave; and as for my mother, though sitting still — as her wont was on Sunday — I saw her eye rambling round the room sometimes, in sad speculation over lost furniture. As I came in I detected her in missing the walnut-secretary, at which my father used to sit and make up his accounts. She apologised to me also silently, with only her eyes, and I went and kissed her. A great deal may pass between two people, who understand one another, without speaking.

Emma was sitting in the centre of the children, telling them a story; and she came smiling towards Erne, holding out her hand. And, when he saw her he loved so truly, he forgot us all; and, keeping his hand away from her, he said, "No! no! not that hand. That one is — I have hurt it. You must never take that hand again, Emma. It's bloody."

I, foreseeing that he would say too much, came up, took his hand, and put it into hers. But, when she saw his face — saw his pale scared look — she grew pale herself, and dropped his hand suddenly. And then, putting together his wild appearance, and the words he had just used, she grew frightened, and went

back with a terrified look in her face, without one word, and gathered all the children around her as if for protection.

"You see even she flies from me. Let me go out and hide my shame elsewhere. I am not fit for the company of these innocent children. I had better go."

This was said in a low tone apart to me. My affection for him showed me that the events of the morning had been too heavy a blow for him, and that, to all intents and purposes, poor Erne was beside himself. There was an ugly resolute stare in the great steel-blue eyes which I had never seen before, and which I hope never to see again. I was terrified at the idea of his going out in his present state. He would only madden himself further; he was wet and shivering now, and the rain still came down steadily, I could see no end to it.

"Come up to sleep, Master Erne."

"Sleep! and dream of George's bloody face? Not I. Let me go, old boy."

"Please don't go out, sir," said I louder, casting a hurried look of entreaty to Emma, who could hear nothing, but was wondering what was the matter, "it will be your death."

"Yes, that is what I want. Let me go."

"Won't Freddy go and kiss his pretty Master Erne?" said Emma's soft voice, suddenly and hurriedly. "Won't Freddy go and look at his pretty watch? Run then, Fred, and kiss him."

Thus enjoined, Fred launched himself upon Erne, and clasped his knee. It was with an anxious heart that I raised him up, and put him into Erne's arms. It was an experiment.

But it was successful. The child got his arm round his neck, and his little fingers twined in his hair; and, as I watched Erne, I saw the stare go out of his eyes, and his face grow quieter and quieter until the tears began to fall; and then, thinking very properly that I could not mend matters, I left Erne alone with the child and with God.

I went and thanked Emma for her timely tact, and put her in possession of the whole case; and then, finding Erne quiet, I made Fred lead him up to bed. It was high time, for he was very ill, and before night was delirious.

My mother gave herself up to a kind of calm despair when she saw what had happened, and that Erne would be an inmate of the house for some time, and that of necessity Emma must help to nurse him. She spoke to me about it, and said that she supposed God knew best, and that was the only comfort she had in the matter.

In his delirium he was never quiet unless either she or I were at his side. For five days he was thus. The cold he had caught, and the shock of excitement he had sustained, had gone near to kill him; but it was his first illness, and he fought through it, and began to mend.

My mother never said one word of caution to Emma. She knew it would be useless. The constant proximity to Erne must have been too much for any efforts which Emma might have made against her passion. I was glad of it. My father merely went gravely about his work; was as respectful and attentive to Erne as ever; while my mother had, as I said before,

resigned herself to despair, and left the whole matter in the hands of God.

Poor Joe! His was a bitter disappointment. Secretary to a member of Parliament: and now — Joe Burton, the humpbacked son of the Chelsea blacksmith; all his fine ambition scattered to the winds. He sat silently brooding now for hours; for a week I think he scarcely spoke. Sometimes he would rouse himself, and help at what there was to do, as a matter of duty; but as soon as he could he sat down again, and began eating his heart once more.

I need not say that we were all very gentle and careful with him. We had somehow got the notion that all our sufferings were as nothing to poor Joe's. I wonder who put that notion afloat. I wonder whether Joe unconsciously did so himself, by his tacit assumption that such was the case. I think it very likely. But Joe was never for an instant selfish or morose; unless his want of cheerfulness was selfish. He certainly might have assisted at that family harmony I spoke of; but then he was at Stanlake while we were learning the tune at home.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

Sir George Hillyar is Witness for Character.

AND dark over head all the while hung the approaching cloud. Reuben, Sykes, and the rest of them had been remanded, and the day drew nigh when Reuben would be committed for trial.

The question was, How far was he really complicated with Sykes and the gang? That he took his

father in, and lodged him, and hid him, could not go very far against him: nay, would even stand in his favour. Then his character was undeniably good until quite lately: and, thirdly and lastly, he had been absent at Stanlake for a long while. These were the strong points in his favour. Nevertheless, since his father had made his most unfortunate appearance, there was very little doubt that Reuben had been seen very often in the most lamentably bad company. It was hard to say how it would go.

At last the day came on. I was the only one of the family who went, and I left laughing, promising to bring Reuben home to dinner; but still I was very anxious, and had tried to make up my mind for the very worst. There was a considerable crowd in the police-court; and, as I was trying to elbow my way as far forward as I could, to hear what case was on, I felt a hand on my shoulder, and looking round, saw Sir George Hillyar.

"Come out of court with me," he said; "I wish to speak with you. The case will not be on this half-hour."

I wondered why he should care so much about it; but I obeyed, and we went out together, and walked to a quiet spot.

"What is your opinion about this matter? What do his associates say — these thieves and prostitutes among whom he has been brought up? What do they say about his chance?"

He said this with such fierce eagerness that I swallowed the implied insult, and answered —

"Six and half-a-dozen, sir. I know him to be innocent, but who is to prove him so?"

"Why did not your father prevent this?" he went on, in a milder tone. "Why did not *you* prevent it? Your father is a man of high character. Why did he not take care of this poor deserted orphan? Christian charity should have made him do so."

"Nobody could have gone on better than Reuben, sir," I answered, "until his father came back three months ago."

I was looking at him as I said this, and I saw that he grew from his natural pallor to a ghastly white.

"Say that again."

"Until his father came back some three months ago — his father, Samuel Burton, who, I have heard say, was valet to your honour."

"Treacherous dog!" I heard him say to himself. And then aloud, "I suppose you do not know where this man Burton is, do you?"

"That is not very likely, sir, seeing that he was the leader in that very business for which poor Reuben has been took."

"Come," he said; "let us go back. Bring Reuben to me after it is all over."

When we got in again the case was on. It seemed so very sad and strange to me, I remember, to see poor Reuben in the dock; the moment I saw him there, I gave him up for lost. It appeared that a grand system of robbery had been going on for some time by a gang of men, some of whom were in the dock at present — that their head-quarters had been at a house in Lawrence Street, kept by an Irish woman, Flanagan, now in custody, and a woman Bardolph, *alias* Tear-sheet, *alias* Hobart Town Sall, still at large: and also in a garret at the top of the house known as Church

Place, which was occupied by the prisoner Burton. The leader of the gang had been one Samuel Burton, *alias* Sydney Sam, not in custody; the father of the prisoner Burton. The principal depôt for the stolen goods appeared to have been in Lawrence Street, (I thought of the loose boards, and trembled), for none had been found at Church Place, which seemed more to have been used as a lurking-place — the character of James Burton, the blacksmith, the occupier of the house, standing high enough to disarm suspicion. The prisoner Sykes, a desperate and notorious burglar and ruffian, had been convicted *x* times; the prisoners Nym, Bardolph, and Pistol *y* times. There was no previous conviction against the prisoner Burton.

The other prisoners reserved their defence; but Mr. Compton had procured for Reuben a small Jew gentleman, who now politely requested that Reuben might be immediately discharged from custody.

On what grounds the worthy magistrate would be glad to know.

“On the grounds,” burst out the little Jew gentleman, with blazing eyes and writhing lips, “that his sole and only indiscretion was to give shelter, and house-room, and food, and hiding, to his own father; when that father came back, at the risk of his life, sixteen thousand miles, to set eyes on his handsome lad again once more before he died — came back to him a miserable, broken, ruined, desperate old convict. He ought not to have received him, you say. I allow it. It was grossly indiscreet for him to have shared his bed and his board with his poor old father. But it was not criminal. I defy you to twist the law of the land to such an extent as to make it criminal.

I defy you to keep my client in that dock another ten minutes."

The people in the court tried to cheer, but I was afraid of irritating the magistrate, and turned round saying, "Hush! Hush!" and then I saw that Sir George Hillyar was gone from beside me.

"The old fault, Mr. Marks," said the quiet, good-natured magistrate to Reuben's frantic little Jew gentleman. "Starting well and then going too far. If I had any temper left after twenty years on this bench, I might have answered your defiance by sending your client for trial. However, I have no temper; and, therefore, if you can call a respectable witness to character, I think that your client may be discharged."

The little Jew gentleman was evidently puzzled here. His witnesses — I was one — were all to prove that Reuben had not been at home for the last two months. As for witnesses to character, I imagine that he thought the less that was said about that the better. However, a Jew is never nonplussed (unless one Jew bowls down another's wicket, as in the case of Jacob and Esau); and so the little Jew lawyer erected on his tip-toes, and, to my immense admiration, and to the magistrate's infinite amusement, called out promptly, with a degree of impudence I never saw equalled, one of the greatest names in Chelsea.

There was subdued laughter all through the court. "The gravity of the bench was visibly disturbed," said the gentlemen of the flying pencils. But, before the rustle of laughter was subdued, our brave little Jew was on tip-toe again, with a scrap of paper in his hand, shouting out another name.

"Sir George Hillyar."

Sir George Hillyar, at the invitation of the worthy magistrate, walked quietly up, and took his seat on the bench. He was understood to say, "I am a magistrate in the colony of Cooksland, and still hold my appointment as Inspector of Police for the Bumbleoora district. The wretched man, Samuel Burton, whose name has been mentioned as leader of this gang of thieves, was once my valet. He robbed my late father, and was transported. The young man, Burton, the prisoner, his son, is a most blameless and excellent young man, whose character is, in my opinion, beyond all suspicion. He was a great favourite with my late father; and I am much interested in his welfare myself. Beyond the criminal indiscretion of saving the man he calls his father from starvation, I doubt if there is anything which can be brought against him."

This clenched the business. Reuben was discharged, while the others were sent for trial. I was mad with joy, and fought my way out through the crowd to the little door by which I thought Reuben would come. I waited some time. First came out the little Jew gentleman, in a state of complacency, working his eyebrows up and down, and sucking his teeth. After him, by a long interval, Sir George Hillyar; whom I took the liberty to thank. But no Reuben.

Sir George stayed with me, and said he would wait till the young man came out. We waited some time, and during that time we talked.

"I suppose," said Sir George, "that Mr. Erne Hillyar has been to see you."

I told him that Erne had come to us on the evening next after the funeral — that he had been seized

with a fever, had been at death's door, and was now getting slowly better.

"Well, then, I don't know that we need talk much about him. If you are nursing him and taking care of him on the speculation of my ever relenting towards him, you are doing a very silly thing. If you are, as I suspect, doing it for love, I admire you for it; but I swear to God, that, as far as I am concerned, you shall have no reward, further than the consciousness of doing a good action. He is quite unworthy of you. Is he going to die?"

"No."

"Then he will marry your sister. And a devilish bad bargain she will make of it. I wonder where Reuben is."

"He must come soon, sir."

"I suppose so. I wish he would make haste. Mind you, you young blacksmith, I am not a good person myself, but I know there are such things; and Compton says that you Burtons are good. I have no objection. But I warn you not to be taken in by Mr. Erne Hillyar, for of all the specious, handsome young dogs who ever walked the earth he is the worst. I wonder where Reuben can be."

It was time to see. I was getting anxious to fight Erne's battle with his brother; but what can a blacksmith do with a baronet, without preparation? I gave it up on this occasion, and went in to ask about Reuben.

I soon got my answer; Reuben had gone, twenty minutes before, by another door; we had missed him.

"He has gone home, sir, to our place," I said to Sir George; and so I parted from him. And, if you

were to put me on the rack, I could not tell you whether I loved him or hated him. You will hate him, because I have only been able to give his words. But his manner very nearly counterbalanced his words. Every sentence was spoken with a weary, worn effort; sometimes his voice would grow into a wrathful snarl, and it would then subside once more into the low, dreamy, distinct tone, in which he almost always spoke. I began to understand how he won his beautiful wife. A little attentive animation thrown into that cynically quiet manner of his — coming, too, from a man who, by his calm, contemptuous bearing, gave one, in spite of one's common sense, the notion that he was socially and intellectually miles above one — would be one of the highest compliments that any woman could receive.

But, when I got home, no Reuben was there. He did not come home that night, nor next day, nor for many days. Sir George Hillyar sent for me, and I had to tell him the fact. "He is ashamed to see my father after what has happened," I said. And Sir George said it was very vexing, but he supposed it must be so. Still, days went on, and we heard nothing of him whatever.

Meanwhile Erne mended again rapidly. One day Mr. Compton had called to see him, and I heard my father and he talking together over Erne's affairs.

"It is curious," said Compton, "this spice of his father's unutterable obstinacy showing out in him just now, is it not. I never knew him obstinate before."

"Then you say," said my father, "that he is only poor by his own choice."

"Entirely. His father being intestate, he comes in for a certain share, for a share of money."

"And he won't touch it?"

"No. He has put it out of his power by a solemn oath. He says his hand is red with his brother's blood!"

CHAPTER XXXIX.

Uncle Bob surprises Erne.

THERE is very little doubt that Emma would have done her duty better had she kept away from Erne altogether. It would have been fairer to him. She had prayed hard to my mother to be allowed a little, only a little more, of him, and my mother had, very wisely, refused it. Now, providence had given him back to her — had put the cup to her lips, as it were; and she, knowing her own strength — knowing by instinct that she had the power to stop when she pleased, and knowing also that, even if her own strength failed, the cup would be taken from her in a very few days — had drunk deeply. She had utterly given herself up to the pleasure of his presence, to the delight of to-day, refusing to see that the morrow of her own making must dawn sooner or later.

My mother and I thought that it was all over and done, and that there was no good in trying to stop matters in any way; and we were so far right. My mother would gladly have stopped it: but what could she do? — circumstances were so much against her. Busy as she was, morning and night, she must either have left Erne, during his recovery, to take care of

himself, or leave him and Emma alone a great deal together. She, as I said before, abandoned the whole business in despair. I was intensely anxious for the whole thing to go on; I saw no trouble in the way. I thought that Emma's often-expressed determination of devoting her whole life to poor Joe was merely a hastily-formed resolution, a rather absurd resolution, which a week in Erne's company would send to the winds. I encouraged their being together in every way. I knew they loved one another: therefore, I argued, they ought to make a match of it. That is all *I* had to say on the subject.

"God send us well out of it," said my mother to me one night.

"Why?" I answered. "It's all right."

"All right?" she retorted. "Sitting in the window together all the afternoon, with their hair touching; — all right! Lord forgive you for a booby, Jim!"

"Well!" I said, "what of that? — Martha and me sat so an hour yesterday, and you sat and see us. Now, then!"

"You and Martha aint Erne and Emma," said my mother, oracularly.

"You don't look me in the face, mother, and say that you distrust Erne?"

"Bless his handsome face — no!" said my mother, with sudden animation. "He is as true as steel — a sunbeam in the house. But, nevertheless, what I say is, Lord send us well out of it!"

I acquiesced in that prayer, though possibly in a different sense.

"You have power over her," resumed my mother.

"You are the only one that has any power over her. Why don't you get her away from him?"

This I most positively refused to do.

"You'd better," said my mother, "unless you want her heart broke." And so she left me.

"Hammersmith, I want you," called out Erne, now almost convalescent, a short time afterwards; "I want you to come out with me. I want you to give me your arm, and help me as far as Kensington."

I agreed after a time, for he was hardly well enough yet. But he insisted that the business was important and urgent, and so we went. And, as we walked, he talked to me about his future prospects.

"You see, old boy, I haven't got a brass farthing in the world. I have nothing but the clothes and books you brought from Stanlake. And—I am not wicked: I forgive anything there may be to forgive, as I hope to be forgiven—but I couldn't take the money from him." I had made my remonstrances on that before and had been stopped.

I now thought it my duty, now he was so much stronger, honestly to repeat the conversation Sir George had held with me, on the day when Reuben was discharged from custody.

"That is his temper, is it?" said Erne. "Well, God forgive him! To resume: I am hopelessly penniless."

I was forced to see that. I had my own plan, though I could not broach it.

"In the middle of which," said Erne, "comes this letter. Read it."

"MY DEAR NEPHEW, MR. ERNE, — From a generous communication received from the new and highly respected bart. in which my present munificent allowance

is continued, I gather that differences, to which I will not further allude, have arisen between yourself and a worthy bart. whom it is unnecessary to mention by name. Unless I am misinformed, this temporary estrangement is combined with, if not in a great degree the cause of, pecuniary embarrassments. Under these circumstances, I beg to call your attention to the fact that I have now been living for many years on the bounty of your late father, and have saved a considerable sum of money. In case 500*l.* would be of any use to you, I should rejoice in your acceptance thereof. I owe your late father more than that, as a mere matter of business. If agreeable to the feelings of all parties, a personal interview is requested.

"Your affectionate uncle,

"ROBERT HAWKINS."

"Well, what do you think of that?"

"I think very well of your uncle, and I should take the money."

"I *must*. But think of my disreputable old uncle, turning up at such a time as this. Do you know my father was always fond of him? I wonder what he is like! I have never seen him."

"Didn't you tell me he drank, sir?" I asked.

"Drink!" said Erne. "He has been drunk nineteen years."

I was lost in the contemplation of such a gigantic spree, and was mentally comparing the case of Erne's Uncle Bob with that of a young lady in Cambridge-shire, who had at that time, according to the Sunday papers, an ugly trick of sleeping for six or seven months at a stretch; and was thinking what a pity it

was two such remarkable characters didn't make a match of it, and live in a caravan; moreover, supposing them to have any family, what the propensities of that family would be — whether they would take to the drinking or to the sleeping, or to both — concluding, that whichever they did they would be most valuable properties; in short, rambling on like my mother's own son: when we came to the house in Kensington, and were immediately admitted into the presence.

This mysterious Uncle Bob was a vast, square-shouldered, deep-chested giant of a man, who was even now, sodden with liquor as he was, really handsome. Erne had often told me that his mother had been very beautiful. Looking at this poor, lost, deboshed, dog of a fellow, I could readily understand it. Erne said he had been drunk nineteen years; if he hadn't told me that, I should have guessed five-and twenty.

Never having had any wits, he had not destroyed them by drinking; and having, I suppose, wound himself up for the interview by brandy or something else, he certainly acted as sensibly as could have been expected of him twenty years before. Besides, God had given this poor drunkard a kind heart; and certainly, with all his libations, he had not managed to wash *that* away. In our Father's house there are many mansions; I wonder if there is one for him!

At the time of his sister's marriage, he had just been raised to the dignity of underkeeper. Life had ceased with the poor fellow then. He was of an old family, and the old rule, that the women of a family last two generations longer than the men, was proved true here. He had shown signs of the family decadence while his sister showed none. She had been vigorous,

beautiful, and vivacious. He was also handsome, but unenergetic, with a tendency to bad legs, and a dislike for female society and public worship. Drink had come as a sort of revelation to him. He had got drunk, so to speak, on the spot, and had stayed so. His life had ceased just as he was raised to the dignity of cleaning Sir George Hillyar's first season guns, nineteen years before; and we found him, sitting before the fire, rubbing one of those very guns with a leather on this very afternoon.

He rose when we went in, and made a low bow to Erne, and then stood looking at him a few seconds. "You are very like your mother, sir," he said gently; "very like."

"My dear Uncle Bob," said Erne, "I am come according to appointment to speak to you about the noble and generous offer of yours."

"Do you accept it, sir?"

"I do most thankfully, my dear uncle. I would speak of it as a loan, but how can I dare do so? I have been brought up in useless luxury. I know nothing."

"You'll get on, sir. You'll get on fast enough," said the poor fellow, cheerfully. "Please come and see me sometimes, sir. You're like my sister, sir. It does me good to hear your voice. Hers was a very pleasant one. We had a happy home of it in the old lodge, sir, before Sir George came and took her away. I saw what had happened the night he came into our lodge, after eight o'clock, and stood there asking questions, and staring at her with his lip a-trembling. I saw. I didn't think — let's see: I was talking about —. Ah! Sam Burton knowing what he knew

and not trading on it — no, not that, I mean I hope you'll come and see me sometimes. If my head was to get clear, as it does at times, I could tell you all sorts of things."

"My dear Uncle, there is but small chance of our meeting for years. I am going to Australia."

"To Australia!" I bounced out, speaking for the first time.

"Certainly," said Erne; "I can do nothing here. And, besides," he added, turning his radiant face on mine, "I found something out last night."

Poor Uncle Bob gave Erne a pocketbook, and, after many affectionate farewells, we departed. I was very thoughtful all the way home. "Found something out last night!" Could it be all as I wished?

CHAPTER XL.

The Last of the Churchyard.

"AND so it is really true that the ship sails this day week, Emma?" said Erne Hillyar to Emma Burton, laughing. "Matters are coming to a crisis now, hey?"

"Yes, they are coming to a crisis," said Emma quietly. "Only one week more."

"Only one week more of old England," said Erne, "and then four months of wandering waves."

"It will soon be over," said Emma.

"Oh, very soon," said Erne. "They tell me that the voyage passes like a peaceful dream. There are some who sail and sail on the sea for very sailing's sake and would sail on for ever. The old Greeks feared and wearied of the sea. We English love it as our mother. Yes, I think there are some of us who would love to live at sea."

"They leave their cares on shore," said Emma.

"They are like you and me, Emma. They have no cares."

"Have we none?"

"I have none. I leave everything humbly in the hands of God. I have been a great sinner, but He has forgiven me. He has been very merciful, Emma."

"I hope He will have mercy. I hope He will lay no burden on any of us greater than we can bear. But, at all events, they say that duty and diligence will carry one through all."

"You are disturbed and anxious, Emma, at this breaking up of old associations. Come with me. Let us walk together down to the old churchyard: it will be the last time for many years — possibly for ever."

"Yes, I will come with you. It will be for the last time for ever. Let us come."

So they two went down together to the old churchyard, and stood in the old place together, looking over the low wall on to the river. The summer evening was gathering glory before it slept and became night. And beyond the bridge, westward, the water and the air above were one indistinguishable blaze of crimson splendour. At their feet the tide was rushing and swirling down to the sea.

They were quite alone, — in perfect solitude among the tombs. Erne was standing, as of old, on the grave of the Hillyar girl, so often mentioned before; and Emma was beside him, touching him, but looking away across the sweeping river.

And so they stood silent for a long while. How long? Who measures lovers' time? Who can say? But the sun was dead, and only a few golden spangles of cloud were blazing high aloft in the west, when Emma felt that Erne had turned, and was looking at her. And then her heart beat fast, and she wished she was dead, and it was all over. And she heard him say, with his breath on her cheek —

"What beautiful hair you have!"

"Yes."

"Here is a long tress fallen down over your shoulder. May I loop it up?"

"Yes."

"May I kiss you?"

"Yes; it will soon be over."

"My darling — my own beautiful bird!"

There was no answer to this, but a short sob, which was followed by silence. Then Erne drew her closer to him, and spoke in that low, murmuring whisper, which Adam invented one morning in Eden.

"Why have we deferred this happy moment so long, Emma? How long have we loved one another? From the very beginning?"

"Yes, I think it was from the very beginning."

"Are you happy?"

"Quite happy. Are you happy, dear?"

"Surely, my own," said Erne. "Why should I not be?"

"Then let us be happy this one week, Erne. It is not long. God surely will not begrudge us one week; life is very long."

So they stood and talked till dusk grew into darkness upon the poor cripple girl's grave. And she lay peacefully asleep, nor turned upon her bed, nor rose up in her grave-clothes, to scare her kinsman from his danger.

The next day was dark and wild, and he was up and away early, to take the last headlong step. His friend, James Burton, went with him, and Erne took passage in the same ship by which the Burtons were going.

It was a busy, happy day. There were many things for Erne to buy, of which he knew nothing, and his humble friend had to assist him in fifty ways. At intervals of business Erne found time to tell Jim everything, and that worthy lad was made thoroughly happy by the news. They were together all day in

the driving rain, scarcely noticing that it blew hard till they got on board ship, and then they heard it moaning melancholy aloft among the spars and cordage, telling of wild weather on the distant sea.

At evening it held up; and Erne coming home, missed Emma, and followed her down to the churchyard. It was a very different evening from the last: low clouds were hurrying swiftly along overhead, and far in the westward a golden bar, scarcely above the horizon, showed where the sun was setting; and, as they looked at it, grew dark once more.

"Emma, my love, it is done."

"What is done?"

"I have taken passage in the same ship with you."

Was it a moan or a cry that she gave? Did it mean joy, or sorrow, or terror? He soon knew, although it was too dark to see her face.

"Don't kill me, Erne, by saying that! Don't tell me that you've been such a madman!"

"My darling, what do you mean?"

"Keep your hand from me, Erne. Do not kiss me. Do not come near me."

"Emma, what is the matter?"

"It is not too late, Erne," she said, kneeling down on the wet tombstone. "If you ever loved me — if you have any mercy on me, or on yourself — don't carry out this intention."

"In Heaven's name why, my love?"

"If I had not thought that we were to part for ever and ever, inexorably, at the end of this week, I could have stopped you in a thousand ways. But I thought that surely I might have one single week of

happiness with you, before we parted never to meet again."

"Why are we to part?"

"I have devoted my whole life to one single object, and nothing must interfere with it. I have made a solemn vow before heaven that nothing ever shall. I allowed myself to love you before I knew the full importance of that object. Even in the old times I saw that I must give you up for duty; and lately that duty has become ten times more imperative than ever. Judge what hope there is for us."

Erne stood silent a moment.

"Speak to me! Curse me! Don't stand silent! I know well how wicked I have been, but think of my punishment —"

"Hush! my darling. You are only dearer to me than ever. Hush! and come here, once more — for the last time if you will, but come."

"Only for one moment. Will you do as I ask you? You will not come with us?"

"I will see. I want to ask you something. Did you think that I was going to part from you at the week's end as if nothing had passed? Could you think so of me? Were you mad, my own?"

"Yes, I was mad — wicked and mad. I did not know. I did not think. I *would* not think."

"And do you think I can give you up so lightly now? I *will* not. I swear it — will not."

He felt her tremble on his arm, but she said quietly, "You must let me go. We must never talk to one another like this again. It is all my fault, I know, I have no one to blame but my wicked self. Good-bye, Erne."

"If you choose to carry out your resolution, you shall do so; but I will be by your side. I will never leave you. I will follow you everywhere. I will wait as long as you will, but I will never give you up."

"God's will be done," she said. "If you will make my trial harder, I can only say that I have deserved it. We must come home, Mr. Hillyar."

"Emma!"

"I have called you Erne for the last time," she said, and walked on.

That night the poor girl lay sobbing wildly in bed hour after hour — not the less wildly because she tried to subdue her sobs for fear of awakening her sleeping little bed-fellow, Fred. Shame at the licence she had allowed Erne, meaning as she did to part with him; remorse for the pain she had inflicted on him; blind terror for the future; and, above all, an obstinate adherence to her resolution, which her own heart told her nothing could ever shake — these four passions — sometimes separately, sometimes combined — tore her poor little heart so terribly, that she hoped it was going to burst, and leave her at rest.

In the middle of the night, in one of the lulls between her gusts of passion — lulls which, by God's mercy, were becoming more and more frequent; when the wild wind outside had died into stillness, and the whole house was quiet; when there was no sound except the gentle breathing of the child by her side, and no movement except its breath upon her cheek — at such time the door was opened, and some one came in with a light. She looked round and said —

"Mother!"

The big, hard-featured blacksmith's wife came to

the bedside, and sat upon it, drawing her daughter to her bosom. She said, "Emma dear, tell mother all about it."

"Kiss me then, mother, and tell me I am forgiven."

"You know you are forgiven, my daughter."

"I never meant to have him, mother. I always loved him; you know that; but I had vowed my life to poor Joe, before ever I saw him. You know you told me to give him up, and I did. I only asked for one more day of him; you remember that."

"And I forbade it."

"You were right and wise, dear. But then he came here in his trouble; and then, dear," she continued, turning her innocent, beautiful face up to her mother's, "I loved him dearer than ever."

"I know that, of course. I don't know what I could have done. Go on, and tell me what has happened now."

"Why, knowing that we were to part for ever at the end of the week" — here her voice sank to a whisper — "I let him tell me he loved me; and I told him I loved him. Oh, my God! I only wanted one week of him — one week out of all the weary, long eternity. Was that so very wicked?"

"You have been wrong, my darling: you have been very, very wrong. You must go on to the end; you must tell me what happened to-night."

"To-night? To-night? In the churchyard? Yes, I can tell you what happened there well enough. I am not likely to forget that. He told me that, so far from our being separated for ever, he had taken passage in

the same ship with us, and was going to follow me to the world's end."

"And what did you do?"

"I knelt and asked his forgiveness, and then cast him off for ever."

Poor Mrs. Burton sank on her knees on the floor, and looked up into her daughter's face.

"Emma! Emma! Can you forgive your wicked old mother?"

"Forgive *you*! I, who have dragged our good name through the dust! I, who have let a man I never meant to marry kiss my cheek! *I* forgive you?"

"Yes, my pure, innocent angel — for so you are — your poor old mother asks your forgiveness on her knees. I might have prevented all this. I broke it off once, as you remember; but when he came back, I let it all go on, just as if I wasn't responsible. I thought it was Providence had sent him back. I thought I saw God's hand in it."

"God's hand *is* in it," said Emma.

"And Jim was so fierce about it; and I am so afraid of Jim. He wants you to marry Erne; and I thought it might be for the best; but I see other things now. Are you afraid of Jim?"

"Yes; what will he say about this?" said Emma.

"He will be very angry. He must never know."

"Erne will tell him."

"Is there no chance of your relenting about Erne Hillyar?" said Mrs. Burton, in a whisper.

"You know me, mother, and you know there is none; I should drag him down."

"Then you must go on with your duty, my child. If you die, dear — if God takes you to His bosom

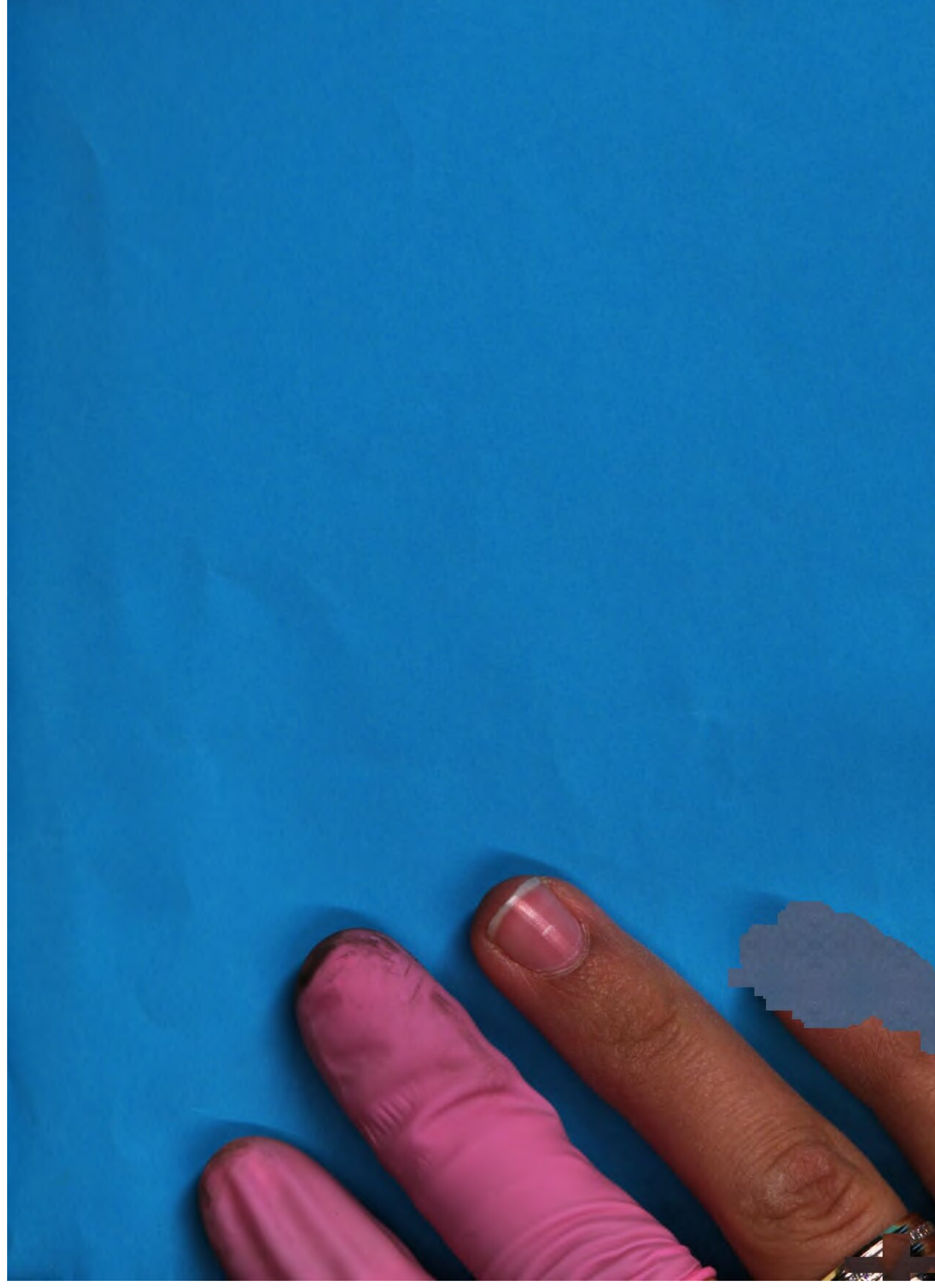
and lets you rest there — you must go on with your duty. Emma, I will give you strength. He would never be happy with you for long, unless he lowered himself to our level; and would you wish him to do that? He is one to rise in the world; and we, with our coarse manners and our poverty, would only be a clog round his neck. I love him for loving you; but remember what he is, and think what a partner he should have. You see your duty to him and to Joe. If the waves of the great, cruel sea we are going to cross rise up and overwhelm us, let your last thought before your death be that you had been true to duty."

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